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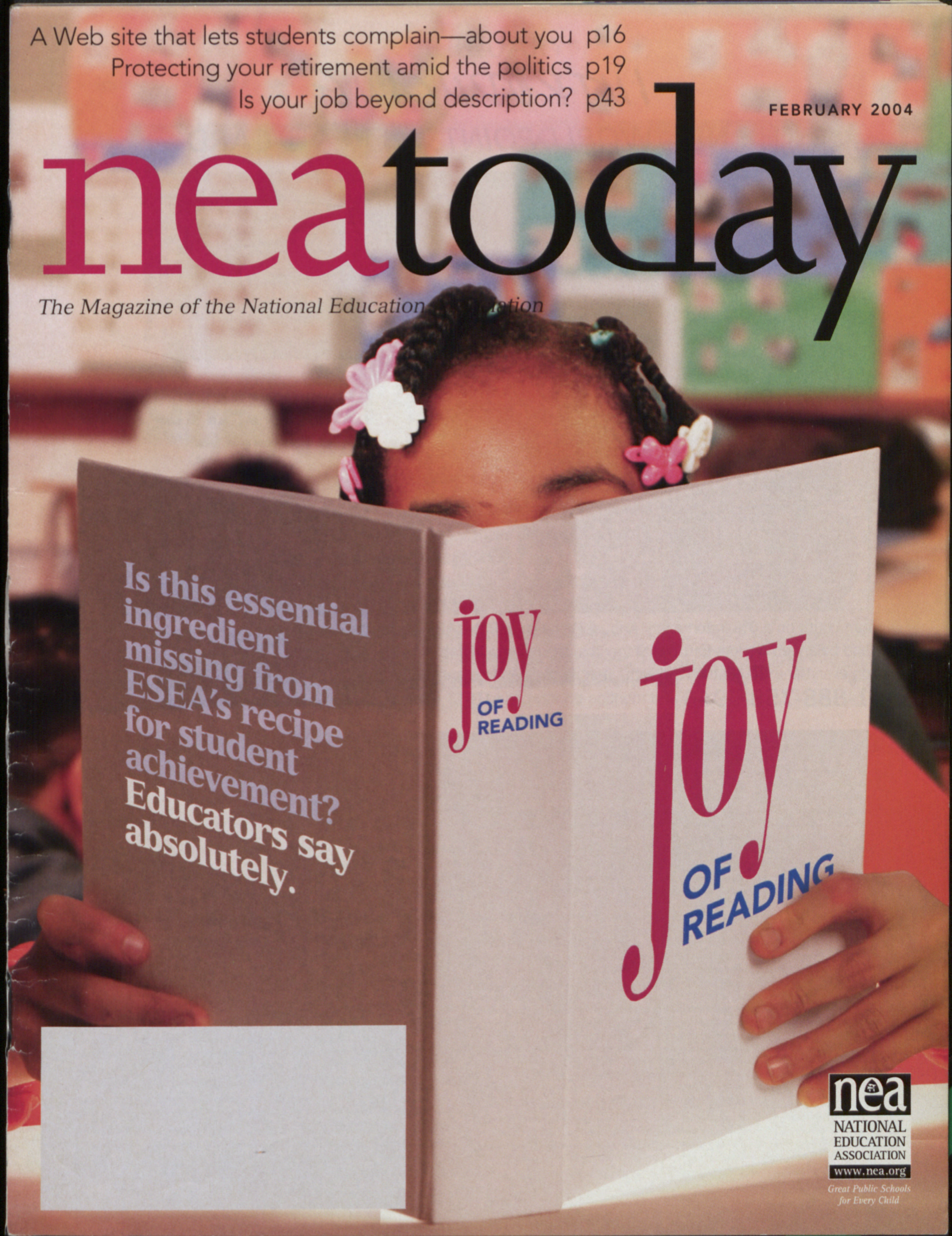
The Magazine of the National Education Association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features

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Saving the Joy

Making kids "proficient" in reading requires more than getting them prepared for tests.

Teaching reading well—getting kids to love it, embrace it, know how to do it right—takes skill, thought, and time. But educators working under the heady pressures of the federal education law say the rush to meet academic targets is making it hard to put those pieces together and play up the fun that should come along.

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PHOTO TOP: EARL RICHARDSON; BOTTOM LEFT: RICHARD CUMMINS; BOTTOM UPPER RIGHT: PRAVASH PRADHAN; BOTTOM RIGHT: VISUAL DOMAIN, LTD.

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PHOTOS THIS PAGE, LEFT FROM TOP: BRYAN KELSEN , TRACY WILCOX
PHOTOS RIGHT FROM TOP: MARK BEALER/BPA, CHARLES VOTAW, ALDEN PELLETT

Hallmarks of Love

A friend who teaches first grade told me a Valentine's tale of love and devotion that goes beyond the Hallmark variety—though Hallmark, actually, was involved. ¶ Her school is located in an area of Montgomery County, Maryland, that has a large immigrant population, a high percentage of students receiving free and reduced-price meals, and many children who don't speak English. Sitting in on her class, I've seen her maneuver through an array of situations that we tend to file under "cultural diversity," such as explaining to adult family members how U.S. libraries can be a resource for books to read to your child. ¶ When February 14 rolled around a couple of years ago, most kids were familiar enough with the holiday and brought in the drugstore-variety perforated valentines. But to her dismay, my friend saw that one child had brought in expensive, individual valentines, one for her and one for each child in the class. His parents, it seemed, wanted him to participate in this celebration so badly that they spent a lot more money than they needed to, and may have had. ¶ Parents love their kids. Rich or poor, educated or not, the vast majority of parents love their kids and would do so much to ensure their happiness and success. Educators love their students. In districts that are rich or poor, schools that are high achieving or low performing (and how that's defined nowadays is up for grabs), educators embrace their work because they love kids. Take a look at Arnold Gundersen, a nuclear engineer who's now a Vermont math teacher ("For the Love of Kids," page 64). And soak in the energy of Lucille Decker, now in her 60th year of teaching, who says, "First grade is my first love" (page 51). ¶ We here at *NEA Today* relish these kinds of love stories, the heart of what makes education soar. (It does make us wonder: Parents love their kids and educators love their students, so why does education funding fall so short? Something to take to heart during this election year.) Thank you for writing in with stories about you or your colleagues. Readers have asked me to clarify how to contact us here at the magazine. You can address letters to me or any of the fabulous editors listed below at 1201 16th Street, N.W., Washington, DC 20036. Our fax number is 202-822-7206. And you can send e-mail to neatoday@nea.org. Happy Valentine's Day. We love telling the world your story.

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Beyond the Same Old Drill

"Sustained" and "thoughtful" are two terms not likely used when we consider ways to improve schools serving disadvantaged and minority children. We seem content with the educational quick fix instead of providing for all our children what they need to receive the quality public education they deserve.

Given all that we know, why would we ever want to 'teacher-proof' reading curricula underneath the guise of providing standardized programs?

—REG WEAVER

And nowhere is this approach more apparent than in teaching reading skills.

Reading First, a part of the new federal education law, was supposed to represent a bold promise—all children would be able to read by the third grade. It's a goal that NEA shares, along with the law's overall goals to ensure academic achievement; to ensure every child has a highly qualified teacher in every classroom; and to hold high expectations for every student.

In spite of the laudable goals of Reading First, its emphasis on "scientifically based reading research" is easily perceived to mean using a one-size-fits-all approach to teach reading, especially in schools serving disadvantaged and minority children.

Sound familiar?

Of course, if we are to be guided by the best research, then we must acknowledge what studies consistently make clear—that no one approach or program works for all students.

In too many instances, choices of what to include in reading programs are based solely on test-driven instruction. Those choices often ignore the need to develop students' ability to comprehend complex texts and to read critically.

There is nothing that says "lowered expectations" like dumbed-down reading drills masquerading as reform. And there is nothing that says "lowered expectations" like ignoring the unique strengths and abilities of children in favor of the right test score.

Let's be clear: children learn to read in different ways. For some children, identifying words is easy and comprehending what they mean is a challenge, but for others, learning phonemes—the sounds out of which words are made—is a challenge, making the identification of words difficult. Different strengths and needs call for different instruction.

A rigorous reading program for students would include reading books independently, and in a teacher-led format, discussing books that have been read and writing assignments based on reading material. Such a program would also include the vital work of librarians, whose work not only enhances the classroom experience but also teaches valuable research skills.

And the research couldn't be clearer on another point—teachers are crucial to promote effective learning from students. Quality teachers are more important than the instructional materials to develop able readers.

So given all that we know, why would we ever want to "teacher-proof" reading curricula underneath the guise of providing standardized programs?

That sentiment is beyond comprehension.

When it comes to improving reading skills, it takes strategic and long-term approaches. It takes well-prepared teachers with flexibility to adapt to student needs. And it takes access to books and promoting reading as a personal habit.

So, as we mark NEA's Read Across America next month, I invite you to have some serious fun as we recommit ourselves to demonstrating the joys and rewards of reading.

By our example during Read Across America, we are motivating students and helping them apply a range of reading skills to complement their reading instruction. Participating in Read Across America addresses the value and importance of reading in a manner far from the same old drill.

NEA PRESIDENT REG WEAVER

PHOTO: MATT FERGUSON

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Tackling everyday discipline problems that make your classroom crazy
Real Zingers
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Discipline: Not just following orders

With respect to the January cover story ("Discipline Zingers"): Discipline must be internalized. If students are just following orders, they are not learning. Children will talk—period. Punishing talking is an exercise in futility. Influencing the content of their conversations is a more attainable goal.

The classroom process can be reframed around things about which students want to talk, rather than fragmented content pouring forth from the teacher that is dictated by a fragmented curriculum.

There are people who do not want children to think—just to obey—but that is not a legitimate goal in a democratic society. One could argue that the problems we face today are the result of the inability of people to work together.

A network is going to facilitate learning more than a hierarchy. Point students toward general principles, lead them toward connecting their lives to the principles, and then point them toward other content to broaden what they know. This can begin with encouraging students to talk with one another, not punishing them for it.

GARY C. GLETTY
Normal, Illinois

THE JANUARY ISSUE OF *NEA Today* was the very best issue that I have ever seen. Congratulations! Please keep up the good work.

VIRGINIA GALVIN
Chesterton, Indiana

I WORK WITH BEGINNING teachers as a mentor coordinator. Student misbehavior and classroom management are serious concerns for us, so I found the cover photo on *NEA Today* to be inappropriate. The student with the rubber band is being glorified for his misbehaving antics.

Although the articles are very much to the point and useful, please refrain from poking fun of such a serious situation in our classrooms.

RICHARD WILLOBEE
Grand Rapids, Michigan

THE 55 RULES

Editors' note: In January we asked for your opinion of Ron Clark's popular book, *The Essential 55*, as well as for your own "essential" rules for classroom management. We were overwhelmed with responses but can only print a few. To read others, visit neatoday@nea.org.

MAYBE RON CLARK is a bit "over the top" on some of his rules—but they work! I paraphrased the 55 and gave it to my fourth graders this year.

I have been absent twice and both substitutes commented on our class as being "very well behaved" and "good workers." These rules are really manners that will help each child be successful in life.

GAYLE TALBOT
Moses Lake, Washington

THE RULE THAT MEANS THE MOST to me is Rule 9: "Always say thank you when I give you something. If you do not say it within three seconds of receiving the item, I will take it back."

I spend my own hard-earned dollars on treats and rewards for my fourth-grade students, so I emphasize this rule.

There have been times when I had to be the "mean" teacher and take back a piece of candy or some other small reward, but luckily, this doesn't happen too often. When it does, I may give the student another chance later in the day, or the student quietly accepts the consequences of not using good manners.

The result is that the students say "thank you" more often to me, their classmates, and other adults.

WENDY NEW
Cincinnati, Ohio

AFTER READING YOUR SAMPLING of the 55 rules, I won't be buying the book. It's ironic that the story followed the article about classroom management suggesting that success is best achieved by being a creative, flexible problem solver. I've taught in two middle schools and two high schools, each one very different from the others. Several of the rules would not have worked in some of the situations I was in, but might have in others.

For example, Rule 19: No moaning or complaining about homework assignments. Unless you have a class that loves to complain, there is nothing wrong with letting students express themselves to you.

A new teacher would do better to talk to veteran teachers and keep a daily journal of successes, failures, and insights, than to try to follow a formula.

ANNE PFEIFFER
Roanoke, Virginia

DON'T LEAVE BOYS BEHIND

I AM CONCERNED by "Girls Rule (the Books)" (UpFront, January). It is wonderful that young ladies have experienced so much success in education and have greater hope for their futures. The tone of this article is celebratory, and that is fitting.

My worry is the apparent lack of concern for the young gentlemen in the classroom. Boys have fallen behind academically. This is clear in test scores and in the minority of young men pursuing post-secondary education. The ratio of female-to-male college students is steadily approaching 60 to 40 percent. The fact that 15-year-old girls are reporting greater expectations than 15-year-old boys for their future occupations should be as alarming to educators as the reverse situation was 15 years ago.

LEONARD DE BOLT
Painted Post, New York

TURNING THE TIDE

I READ WITH GREAT INTEREST NEA President Weaver's article, "The Tide is Turning" (President's Viewpoint, January) in which he addressed the inadequacies of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act. The title of the legislation itself, "No Child Left Behind," is a complete and total contradiction. The Bush administration works overtime using such tactics to—it hopes—"fool all the people all of the time."

Teachers across our country can make a difference in 2004. The survival of the public school system, among other social programs, hangs in the balance.

HARRY COOPER
Elkton, Maryland

The staff bathroom was wired to the hallway lights, which were on a timer and didn't come on until 10 minutes before the students came. —DIANE THOMPSON

STEAMED IN MAINE

I AM SO HOT UNDER THE COLLAR that even the howling Maine nor'easter we are having at the moment can't cool me off!

I just brought the latest issue of *NEA Today* in through the wind and drifting snow and opened it to find the article "When Retirement Beckons" (January).

Someone goofed. No article on retirement these days is acceptable unless the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and the Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP) are addressed as possible threats to earned Social Security retirement income.

SUE SHAW
Penobscot, Maine

BERRY BURGERS BAD?

AS A PERSON WITH FOOD allergies, "Very Berry Burgers? Don't Laugh" certainly didn't make me laugh; it greatly concerned me (UpFront, January). Though it may sound like a nutritional breakthrough to add fruits and vegetables to children's favorite, traditionally high-fat foods, the dangers of this cannot be overlooked. What if a child is allergic to blueberries? That child would never expect to find them in a hamburger!

I know schools want to provide children with meals of greater nutritional value. But "sneaking in" ingredients that might be considered healthy for some, could be life-threatening for others.

VALERIE BOLLING
Stamford, Connecticut

RESPECT AND BATHROOMS

IT IS APPALLING TO ME that teachers get so little respect that not only do we barely get time to go to the bathroom, but also the size and location of bathrooms seems like an afterthought in building schools (Editor's Note, January).

In my school, the staff bathroom was wired to the hallway lights, which were on a timer and didn't come on until 10 minutes before the students came.

When I complained that I didn't want to have to use a flashlight to go to the bathroom, I was told there was nothing they could do. Luckily, I'm on good terms with the custodian. He agreed that the bathroom lights never should have been wired that way and made the necessary changes. The other appalling thing is that I was the first to complain about this, even though the building has been open seven years.

DIANE THOMPSON
Williamston, Michigan

LET'S TALK

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Letters are edited for length and clarity.

upfront

Trends
Facts
Innovators
Wisdom
Research
First 5
News
Quotes
Humor

Enough Already!

Teachers and paraeducators may be the ones on the front lines, but that certainly hasn't stopped a whole host of other folk from joining the march against the Elementary and Secondary Education Act—the so-called No Child Left Behind law. The public already expressed its confusion and angst over the federal education law in one recent poll. Now come principals, superintendents, state governors, and even legislators with the plea: fix it or forget it. Some school districts are so fed up they're now telling the government to keep its money—and the strings that come with it.

According to a survey by Public Agenda, nearly one-third of school principals and superintendents think the law "probably won't work," while the remaining two-thirds think it "will require many adjustments" before it's even palatable. Their biggest problem: the law simply "relies too much on standardized testing."

From Maine to Montana, governors and legislators are expressing the same sentiment, and some are pummeling Secretary of Education Rod Paige with pleas for change, not to mention funds that will help the law work.

"We all want to help our schools succeed," writes Senator Olympia Snowe of Maine. "However,...the [federal] law is focusing public attention on the negative consequences and is punitive in nature, rather than reinforcing and highlighting positive elements of school success."

School districts, meanwhile, are crying out. At least two in Connecticut, and a handful in Vermont, say they're rejecting their Title I funding, while officials in Suffolk County, Virginia, are exploring the idea. Vermont, Utah, and Hawaii even considered turning down their state allotments.

It's not that these bold moves promise to shield schools from the mandates—federal officials still are trying to decide how to react. But it certainly sends a message that states are reaching their limits.

Or are already there.

Voucher Victory

PUBLIC EDUCATION is alive and well in Colorado. The Denver District Court has declared the state's private school voucher program unconstitutional, saying it strips local school boards of control over education. NEA and the Colorado Education Association sponsored the suit on behalf of parents and educators in the 11 school districts forced to participate in the program. The districts could have lost $90 million a year to vouchers.

ILLUSTRATION: KEN ORVIDAS

I hereby resolve... to keep my resolutions

New Year's resolutions—we all make them and by this time each year most of us break them. But 2004 will be the year we stick with 'em! If you're feeling a little wishy-washy on those newly minted promises, check out these tips guaranteed to boost your willpower and keep you on track.

1. **PACE YOURSELF. Set a gradual schedule for attaining your goal and measure your progress in baby steps. Instead of getting super-fit, vow to exercise just one more time a week for February, then two times for March. Trying to save more money? Set aside a few extra bucks from each paycheck, rather than one large lump sum.**
2. **FIND A BUDDY. Team up with a neighbor, relative, or friend who's made a similar resolution and cheer each other on to success. If your resolution involves losing weight, exercising more, or learning a new skill, find a class in your area and sign up.**
3. **GO PUBLIC. Go on the *Oprah* show and announce your plans on national television. Not glitzy enough? Then consider videotaping your pledge and sending it to a friend who will keep you honest.**
4. **CUT YOURSELF SOME SLACK. Missing a day of exercise or sneaking an extra donut doesn't mean it's time to throw in the towel. Keep your expectations realistic and celebrate the progress you make each day.**

$40,000

150 SCHOOL DISTRICTS IN NEW JERSEY have a starting teacher's salary of $40,000 or more.

A–B–Cs and 1–2–3s

AMERICAN STUDENTS are well on their way to mastering their multiplication tables. Seventy-seven percent of fourth graders and 68 percent of eighth graders performed at the basic level on the latest National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), meaning students demonstrated a partial mastery of skills. That's up from 59 percent and 58 percent, respectively, 11 years ago.

Students' reading performance, meanwhile, has remained relatively unchanged during that same time period—63 percent of fourth graders and 74 percent of eighth graders reached the basic level last year, compared to 62 percent and 69 percent in 1992.

NAEP measures the academic performance of a sample of fourth and eighth graders in several subjects. The 2003 test covered math and reading.

Notepad

Coming Attraction: A Colossal Investment in California's Future!

Chronically underfunded for more than two decades—and bled dry by $4 billion in cuts in the past two years—California schools trail the national per-pupil spending average. In response, the California Teachers Association (CTA) is pulling out the stops to secure the resources schools need and *deserve.*

CTA has teamed up with filmmaker-child advocate Rob Reiner to place the "Improving Classroom Education Act" on the November 2004 ballot. This initiative would amend the state constitution to establish a trust fund—financed through a modest commercial property tax increase—dedicated exclusively to public education.

Two-thirds of fund money would go straight to K–12 classrooms for needs such as class size reduction, teacher training, and instructional materials, and one-third would provide voluntary universal preschool for children one year prior to kindergarten. And none of this cash could be spent on administrative overhead.

When Reiner and CTA President Barbara E. Kerr jointly announced this initiative last autumn, Reiner said, "We both believe that providing a quality education for all children is the most important investment we can make for the future of California."

Have a great idea?
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> **By e-mail:**
> **ideas@neatoday.nea.org**

ILLUSTRATION TOP: MERCEDES MCDONALD; BOTTOM: PHOTODISC

Strength in Solidarity

IT WASN'T EASY. But in October, after a year and a half of negotiations, members of Michigan's Midland City Educational Support Personnel Association (MCESPA) secured their first contract as NEA members. The local, formerly part of the United Steel Workers of America, voted in May 2002 to join NEA. The switch made all the difference at the bargaining table, according to MCESPA Vice President Joseph Ostyn.

"Before, we had consecutive contracts where we had given monies away to the point of being ridiculous," says Ostyn, a custodian. "This time I felt like we didn't get walked over again."

The new contract implements a four-step wage schedule based on years of service and includes a 2.5 percent retroactive pay increase for the 2002–03 school year and a 1.75 percent increase this year. That brings the entry-level wage up to $10.42 an hour, with more experienced ESPs earning more than $12 an hour. Many ESPs had remained at an hourly rate of $9.64 since the wage was implemented in 1996.

"Our goal was basically to keep the same working conditions and improve pay," says UniServ Director Karen Sherwood. "In the end, that's about where we all arrived."

(Un)Healthy Bill of Fare

Think the new Medicare law only concerns gramps and granny?

Guess again. The 678-page law signed by President Bush in December is bad medicine for anyone who relies upon employer-provided comprehensive health insurance.

Most of the headlines about the NEA-opposed bill focused on the prescription drug provision for seniors, which doesn't even go into effect until 2006 and already has been attacked as inadequate in the face of increasing drug costs (up 17 percent last year).

But it's not just those on Medicare who stand to lose. An obscure provision in the law providing for Health Savings Accounts (HSAs) could cause premiums for comprehensive health insurance to *more than double*, warns the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities, a Washington think tank.

Here's why. The new HSAs, which allow employees to put aside money tax-free to pay for qualifying medical expenses, will appeal primarily to healthier and wealthier employees: they won't lose much (since they're not using many health services now), and they gain a tax break. But pulling healthier employees out of comprehensive plans hurts those who remain because they're likely to be hit with higher out-of-pocket charges.

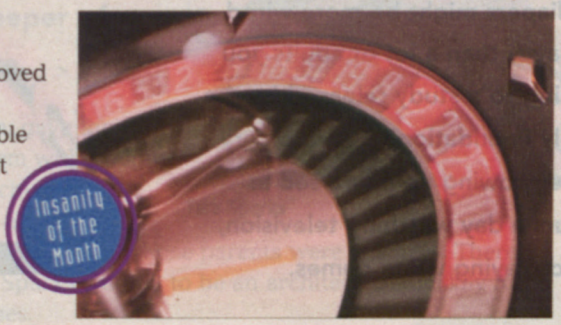
That's hardly the only flaw in the new law. The bill also provides for a risky experiment to privatize Medicare services, and Congressional negotiators ignored an NEA-endorsed provision, passed by the Senate, that would have protected benefits for pre-Medicare retirees.

What to do? Oregon Education Association-Retired member Jerry Wilkins says think voting booth. "For those who pushed this [bill] through," he says, "there will be payback come election time." For more on why the Medicare law is bad medicine for you, go to www.nea.org/retired.

PHOTO: NATHAN HAM; ILLUSTRATION: MARIA RENDON

A Losing Bet

Edison Schools Inc., the for-profit management firm that can't seem to earn a profit, has a new—and rather unwilling—owner: school and other public employees in Florida.



IN NOVEMBER, Edison shareholders approved the company's purchase by the Florida Retirement System, thanks to a questionable decision by one of the system's investment fund managers, Liberty Partners. In case you missed it, Edison is the private management firm launched by Chris Whittle that gets headlines by pledging to raise student achievement and provide more efficient management—and then skips out when it's clear it can't keep the promises.

That has Florida members like retiree Joan King hopping mad. "The Florida Retirement System receives contributions from our members to invest on their behalf. And now they're going to use our contributions to finance Edison, which could result in members losing their jobs," King says. "Why are they speculating on a dying company?"

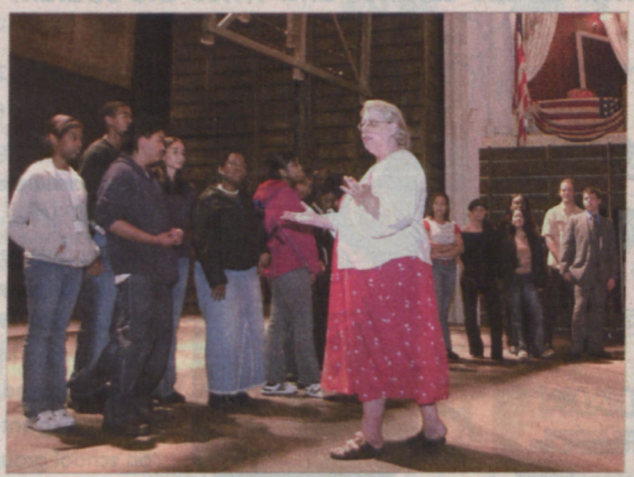
Florida Governor Jeb Bush, who has led a massive drive to privatize government jobs in the state, serves on the three-member board that reviews the retirement system's investment decisions. Officials with the pension system deny that the investment was political.

If not, it's simply bad business. Edison's stock price has plummeted from $36 to $2 per share, and the firm was $73 million in debt before the buyout. The buyout is a boon to the irrepressible Whittle, though. He'll get a raise—to $600,000 plus a 275 percent bonus if the company does well, *The Miami Herald* reports.

[Total ACRES maintenance and landscape workers MOW of PUBLIC SCHOOL GROUNDS EACH YEAR.

From the Page to the Stage

With a $15,000 grant from NEA, the Ford's Theatre distributed more than 2,300 copies of *The Grapes of Wrath* to Washington, D.C.-area high schools in tandem with its production of the stage version of the story. About 150 local students also attended Ford's acclaimed theater appreciation workshop.



NEA member **Sharon Anderson** acts out a scene with students from Maryland's Oxon Hill High School at Ford's Theatre in Washington, D.C.

PHOTO TOP: PHOTODISC; BOTTOM: SANDY SCHAEFFER

Global Takes

Keeping Up with the World

How well are U.S. students performing compared with other kids around the world? According to the 2003 *Condition of Education*, an annual report from the U.S. Department of Education, U.S. fourth graders have higher reading scores than students in 23 other countries. Only three countries surpass the United States in reading performance: England, Sweden, and the Netherlands.

When it comes to learning new math skills, though, American students are behind the curve. Students in eighth-grade math classes spend 53 percent of their time reviewing old material and only 47 percent of their time learning and practicing new content. In contrast, students in Japan spend 76 percent of their time working on new skills.

—AMIR SHOUCRI

Homing in on Higher Learning

According to the 2003 *Report of the Pan-Canadian Education Indicators Program*, 41 percent of Canadians are college or university graduates—that's more than the United States, with 37 percent, and Japan with 34 percent. The percentage is even higher among Canadian 25- to 34-year-olds with 61 percent having some kind of post-secondary education. So what is everyone studying? The report found the largest concentration of college grads in the combined fields of the social sciences, business, and law.

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High-Tech Tots

Babies still in diapers might be more wired up and tech-savvy than a lot of adults you know. According to a study released by the Henry J. Kaiser Family Foundation, even the very youngest children are growing up immersed in media, spending hours a day watching television, using computers, and playing video games.

Children six years and younger spend, on average, two hours a day using screen media, well more than the mere 39 minutes a day they spend reading on their own or with a parent. And nearly half of them are on a computer by their sixth birthday.

Meanwhile, this wired lifestyle is showing in children's waistlines, according to a study by the City University of New York Graduate Center. Children ages 4 to 14 who use home computers more than eight hours a week weigh about 12 pounds more than children who do not use computers at home, according to the study. These high-tech kids generally spend about three hours less each week playing sports and outdoor activities than their peers who do not use computers at all. Is it any wonder children are getting heavier?

—URMILA SUBRAMANYAM

76.3% Percent of schools that let **STUDENTS BUY SOFT DRINKS, SPORTS DRINKS,** and **FRUIT DRINKS** on school grounds.

Coca-Cola 'Swerves' To Stay in Schools

What do you call a drink with all the calories and twice the sodium of Coca-Cola Classic?

Well, the Coca-Cola Corporation calls it Swerve, a new flavored milk drink sold only in schools—a "healthy" alternative to the traditional sodas that many schools have banned because of concerns about child nutrition and obesity. Swerve, which features a cartoon of a cow in sunglasses on its can (remind anyone of the cigarette industry's "Joe Camel?"), joins Coke-owned Minute Maid orange juice, Powerade, and Dasani water as products the soft drink giant is marketing in its fight to stay on school grounds.

PHOTO TOP: BRYAN MULLENNIX; BOTTOM: COURTESY OF COCA-COLA

Living Her Dream

When she was growing up, Tara Sparks wanted to be her teachers. In preschool, she wanted to be Miss Alicia, keeper of the toys and guardian of naptime.

Tara Sparks

HER THIRD-GRADE HERO, Mr. Washington, gave the class fun math projects and rewarded them with boogie time. Her eighth-grade muse was Mrs. Schukai, a drama and English teacher who inspired Sparks to follow in her footsteps. Sparks even envied the kids whose parents were teachers. There was a brief stint in the sixth grade when Sparks wanted to be an architect, but luckily for Missouri's students, she came to her senses.

Today, Sparks teaches eighth-grade English at Sperring Middle School in St. Louis, and like the teachers who inspired her when she was growing up, she's making a powerful impact on the academic and personal lives of her students. Although only 28 years old, Sparks already has an impressive list of career accomplishments. Last year, Sparks became Missouri's 2003–04 Teacher of the Year, making her the second youngest in the state's history. And two years ago she earned her National Board Certification after just four years in the classroom.

What is Sparks' message to other beginning teachers? "Keep learning! That's how you rejuvenate yourself and your classroom," she says. Self reflection has helped Sparks most in her teaching career, she says, while professional development has helped her focus that reflection. "The fun and challenge of teaching," says Sparks, "is helping your students travel from point A to point B, and watching them arrive at that magical 'a-ha!' moment."

[NOBODY EVER TOLD ME]

Wet Behind the Ears

Like many, I did my student teaching in a university town that used a lot of student teachers during the year. My turn came in January. I wanted to look good for my first day, so I dressed in my best suit coat and tie.

I was told to report to the high school for work. When I arrived, I found I had been assigned to teach ninth grade, which was located at the junior high school about four blocks away. Rather than drive four blocks, I decided to walk across a snow-covered field between the two schools. As I made my way across the field, which had about a foot of snow on it, I saw what looked to me like a sidewalk connecting the two buildings. As I stepped onto the sidewalk I heard a crack and found myself waist deep in a cold partially-frozen creek. I struggled out and debated whether it was better to show up late or wet. I chose wet and sloshed sheepishly into the principal's office and told him I was the new student teacher for the quarter. At least he held his laughter until I went into the hall to dry off.

—ROBERT L. NICHOLS
Retired art teacher, Eureka, Montana

First 5 Years

Two-Minute Tips

Comfortable Clarinets

I teach beginning band. I cut soft pencil cushions in half and have my clarinet players put them on their thumb rests. This really helps with comfort and it's not very expensive.

—PENNI COON
Filer, Idaho

Keyboarding Hopscotch

I have a great tip for teaching keyboarding skills. Use an overhead projector to project a transparency of a keyboard onto a shower curtain liner. Then, using a permanent marker, trace each key onto the liner. Put it on the floor and let students spell their names by stepping on the keys.

—ANGELA SAXON
Moody, Alabama

A Laughing Matter

I found that the line for the pencil sharpener in my class was longer than usual on test days. To use this time wisely and help students relax, I make any necessary announcements first, then give students 45 seconds to sharpen their pencils and to tell a neighbor a funny joke. Students always hurry back to their seats so they can tell a joke. After the time is up, I ask one student to share a joke and we all laugh and start the quiz.

—MELINDA JURUS
Dublin, Ohio

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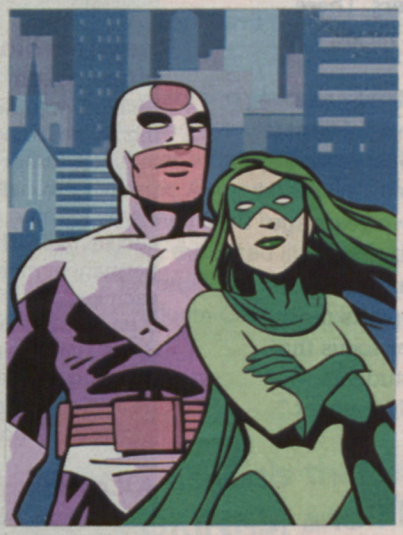
PHOTO TOP: DEBRA ANGSTEAD; ILLUSTRATION BOTTOM: ART GLAZER

Good Headlines, Bad Bottom Line

IF YOU THOUGHT former Minnesota Governor Jesse "The Body" Ventura was an "X-treme" kind of guy, take a look at the education plan of Minnesota's current governor, Tim Pawlenty. He has proposed replacing teachers at underachieving schools with "super teachers" who, if they succeed in raising test scores, could earn up to $100,000 a year in salary and bonuses. The trade-off? "Super teachers" would have to waive union rights including tenure and job protection, says Pawlenty, so "we can hire who we want, fire who we want, and assign them when we want and how we want."



So, how do teachers feel about a gold-for-grades system with educators serving at the state's pleasure?

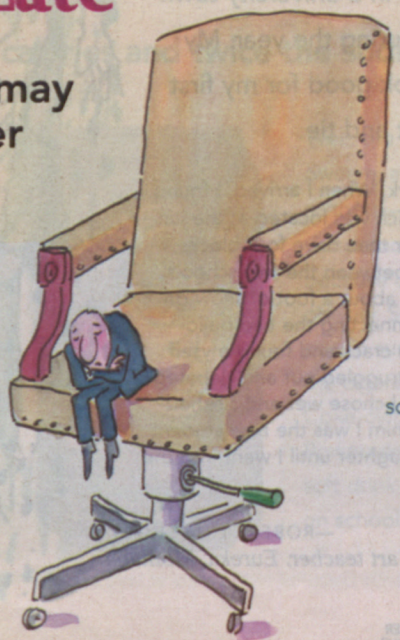
"The governor continues to come up with proposals that make good headlines," says Education Minnesota President Judy Schaubach. "But he has failed to come to grips with many fundamental steps that need to be taken to raise student achievement. Every child deserves a super teacher. We need to increase compensation for all teachers so that we retain our quality teaching force and attract bright new teachers into the profession." Other ingredients for success include small class sizes, parental involvement, up-to-date materials, "and students who show up."

Too Little, Too Late

Poky urban school districts may be causing their own teacher shortages, according to a report by the New Teacher Project.

The report, *Missed Opportunities: How We Keep High-Quality Teachers Out of Urban Classrooms*, blames sluggish hiring schedules for the loss of qualified teachers to other schools or districts. The districts have no problems recruiting teachers, according to the study. In fact, they typically attract large numbers of highly qualified applicants who are committed to teaching in urban settings. (One school received 4,000 applications for 200 openings!) But, in all of the cases featured in the report, the schools did not offer any jobs until late summer, long after the more qualified candidates had accepted other offers. Nearly half of those candidates said they would have taken jobs in the urban district if those offers had come earlier. That's a clear message to urban schools: Hire your teachers early!

—AMIR SHOUCRI



ILLUSTRATION, TOP: PAUL GILLIGAN; BOTTOM: ART GLAZER

The Anti-Drug: Family Dinners

Who would have thunk? Frequent family dinners may help protect teens against illegal drug use and stress—and even help them do better in school, according to a study from the National Center on Addiction and Substance Abuse (CASA) at Columbia University.

As teens move from middle to high school—the years when teen substance abuse risks are highest—they eat with their families 29 percent less frequently. Not good. The study found that 12- to 17-year-olds who miss the evening meal more than twice a week are seven times more likely to use illegal drugs, alcohol, and cigarettes than teens who eat with their families five or more times a week. They're also more likely to have sex, encounter stress, and get into fights. "This is true regardless of a teen's gender, family structure, or family socioeconomic level," said CASA's Lauren Elbaum.

Pass the word.

—TIFFANY MITCHELL

30% The number of **HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS** who complete some form of advanced foreign language study by graduation.

Be Mine

LOVE IS IN THE AIR and teachers everywhere are reaching for those tasty candy hearts with the funny sayings. Each year, the New England Confectionery Company, better known as NECCO, manufactures 8 billion of these little treats, called Sweethearts Conversation Hearts. And plenty of them end up in classrooms. With this in mind, the candy company last year released 10 new sayings that honor education. You'll now find phrases like "Let's Read," "Teach Me," and "School Mate" mixed in with old favorites like "Be Mine" and "Hot Stuff." **Grab a handful.**

Smile

As my principal Mr. H observed my first-grade class, I had students follow simple directions I wrote on the board. I tried, "shake Mr. H's hand." A sweet, shy girl raised her hand, walked up to the principal, and whacked him soundly across the back of the head. When I asked what she was doing, she replied, "You wrote smack Mr. H's head."

In his evaluation, the principal noted that the student did show recognition of beginning and ending consonant sounds. His only concern was where I was going to be teaching the next year. (He was only kidding.)

—ALAN ROSENBERG
Timberville, Virginia

We had a "Camouflage Day" as part of Spirit Week at my high school. One of the freshmen boys in my elective class left his desk too many times that day, and I had to reprimand him. I warned him that I didn't want him to leave his chair again until the bell rang. I had to stifle a smile, though, when I overheard him tell a classmate, "I didn't think she could see me."

—LEAH STEVENS
Lindsay, Oklahoma

While instructing my kindergartners in the proper use of computers, I reminded them it was important to use quiet voices. "Does anyone know why?" I asked. One student had an answer: "So everyone can constipate."

—MARIETTA CANALIZO
Plymouth, North Carolina

Have a funny school story, anecdote, or vignette you'd like to share?

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ILLUSTRATION TOP: PHOTODISC; PHOTO BOTTOM: PHOTODISC

Are You 'THE WORST TEACHER EVA'?

A popular new Web site lets students praise or condemn their teachers online—anonymously. Can they really do that?

As he explains it, Michael Hussey just wants to "hold teachers accountable." So the young entrepreneur joined California teachers Tim and Nancy Davis in creating RateMyTeachers.com (RMT), a for-profit Web site where students can "have their opinions validated."

If you're a teacher, chances are you've already been rated on RMT, whether you know it or not. RMT claims that 537,030 teachers from 29,254 schools have received some 3.2 million ratings since the site was launched in August 2001.

HOW DOES IT WORK? Students rate their teachers on a scale of one to five in three categories: easiness, helpfulness, and clarity. Based on the average of the latter two categories, the teacher is assigned a smiley, frowny, or neutral face.

ONE HAS THE RIGHT TO SAY someone is bad at what they do. It's like calling someone ugly or beautiful. It's in the eye of the beholder.

— FIRST AMENDMENT EXPERT MARK GOODMAN, STUDENT PRESS LAW CENTER

Teachers are identified by name, school, and department, but only those in middle or high schools can be rated. Students are also free to post personal comments about teachers. Both the ratings and comments are anonymous.

Hussey, a former substitute teacher from Maine, claims that 60 to 80 percent of the ratings are favorable. Many comments are indeed complimentary: "Koolest teacher…Da bomb….He actually explains things, a refreshing change from the stuffy snobby teachers I've had before."

But other comments are just plain hurtful: "Killed most of my love of Latin….She loves insulting and demeaning students…. THE WORST TEACHER EVA!!!"

One student, in justifying the 1.0 rating he or she gave a New York teacher (the worst possible), complained, "if ur standing up or talkin wen ur not supposed to be, she goes krazy and picks on u thru the rest of the period...i dont like her at ALL."

Hussey told *NEA Today* that his site is "just another resource to help teachers improve" and argued that it's had a "positive effect on classroom instruction."

While some teachers have complained, "many teachers thank us for it," Hussey added. "They take the information from the Web site and use it to improve instruction. Eventually, all teachers will accept it."

How would he respond to a teacher distraught over a student's comments? Hussey quoted his mother, a Maine teacher and union building rep: "You have to have tough skin to be a teacher."

Perhaps. But in complaints posted on the site's "User Comments" page, teachers have criticized the practice of student anonymity and threatened litigation.

So, can a teacher sue RMT over student comments that it posts? Michael Hussey and his lawyers don't think so.

Hussey says that RMT has adopted "Rating Rules" that prohibit certain objectionable comments. And he maintains that postings are screened by student volunteers and that roughly 5 percent of all comments are never posted.

Mark Goodman, executive director of the Student Press Law Center and an expert on the First Amendment rights of students, doubts that a lawsuit against RMT would succeed.

Teachers can't sue, he says, because student opinions about teachers are constitutionally protected. "One has the right to say someone is bad at what they do," he points out. "It's like calling someone ugly or beautiful. It's in the eye of the beholder."

Goodman says the federal Communications Decency Act probably would protect RMT. This law grants immunity from most civil lawsuits to "interactive computer service" providers that allow third parties to post messages on cyber bulletin boards.

What can be done? One smart option for an NEA local affiliate is to persuade its district to block access to RMT from school computers. According to RMT's "Wall of Shame," almost 500 schools have done just that.

And while Hussey states that he won't honor teachers' requests to remove their names from the site, individuals can have objectionable comments temporarily removed—by clicking on the red flag next to the comment—pending review by RMT staff.

One user recently suggested that RMT create a "ratemystudents.com" Web site for teacher use. We checked—that URL has already been taken.

—MICHAEL D. SIMPSON
NEA Office of General Counsel

ILLUSTRATION: DENNIS HARMS

South Carolina

The state of South Carolina proclaims that, legally, it need only provide a "minimally adequate" education. In response, eight rural districts have hauled legislators into court in a funding lawsuit.

In their defense, lawmakers have blamed dismal school funding on the "recession." Richard Miller, executive director of **The South Carolina Education Association (SCEA),** thinks the only thing that's gone into recession is leadership.

"Governor Mark Sanford and others have vowed to raise per-capita income by cutting the income taxes of the state's wealthiest citizens—not by investing more in public education, school construction, or job training for displaced workers," Miller says. "And our legislature failed to fully fund its standards and accountability model this year, yet held the Department of Education, our educators, and students to those standards!"

Don't think the business community isn't taking notes. "'I can't find the workers I need.' You hear that throughout South Carolina," the chairman of the state Chamber of Commerce testified at the school funding trial. Stay tuned.

Nebraska

The **Nebraska State Education Association (NSEA)** is joining with the Nebraska Coalition of Educational Equity and Adequacy (NCEEA) to file a school funding lawsuit against the state. NCEEA's brief will contend that, under current funding restrictions, Nebraska's public schools cannot give each child the equitable and adequate education guaranteed by the state constitution.

NSEA and its coalition partners are calling for more funding to ensure an in-depth curriculum at each school that "meets the requirements of an essential education for every student." The plaintiffs also cite the need for highly qualified and competitively paid teaching staff in each classroom—and adequate facilities and support services to help every child meet achievement standards.

Massachusetts

Through intensive organizing and mass lobbying, the **Massachusetts Teachers Association (MTA)** and other unions have won a long fight to get the state to honor contracts it negotiated nearly three years ago for more than 13,000 public higher education employees.

Governor Mitt Romney has signed legislation, overwhelmingly approved by the legislature, that authorizes more than $34 million for stalled higher ed raises. But Romney says he won't build those increases into his next budget.

So much for written promises. MTA President Catherine A. Boudreau says she's now "counting on legislators" to ensure that the state lives up to its word.

Colorado

A District Court judge has ruled for the plaintiffs in an NEA-financed suit against a new law creating a "pilot" voucher program in 11 Colorado districts. The judge has held that the law violates the "local control" clause of the state constitution and issued an injunction against program implementation.

This decision "reinforces our belief that our statewide system of public education is founded on the principal of local control," says **Colorado Education Association** President Ron Brady. "There is no doubt the state will appeal this decision. But we remain committed to focusing on the things that make a *real* difference in student achievement and we will continue to reject all attempts to bring vouchers to Colorado."

Michigan

At a November rally, NEA President Reg Weaver urged more than 400 Southfield teachers and support professionals to "keep up the fight" in their protracted contract dispute over wages and health insurance. Following a quarter-mile-long candlelight march to the Southfield school board meeting, Weaver urged board members to negotiate a fair contract with three **Michigan Education Association** locals representing nearly 1,400 district employees.

Delaware

Four **Delaware State Education Association** local affiliates in the Capitol School District have won an arbitration case over the superintendent's decision to force education support professionals and teachers to work or attend a Professional Development Day during a severe snowstorm in February 2003, even though schools were closed to students. If employees didn't show up, they were docked or forced to use a leave day.

The arbitrator awarded the decision to all four locals and ordered the district to make the affected employees "whole" either through pay or paid leave and to "cease and desist from future violations of...contractual provisions on future days on which schools are closed for inclement weather."

California

The **California Teachers Association (CTA)** acted swiftly to provide help to members victimized by deadly fires in Southern California. Through its disaster relief fund, CTA awarded 59 grants totaling $59,000 and made 41 loans totaling $52,000 to members in need.

CTA chapters also pitched in by donating meals and bedding, caring for pets, and providing housing for victims.

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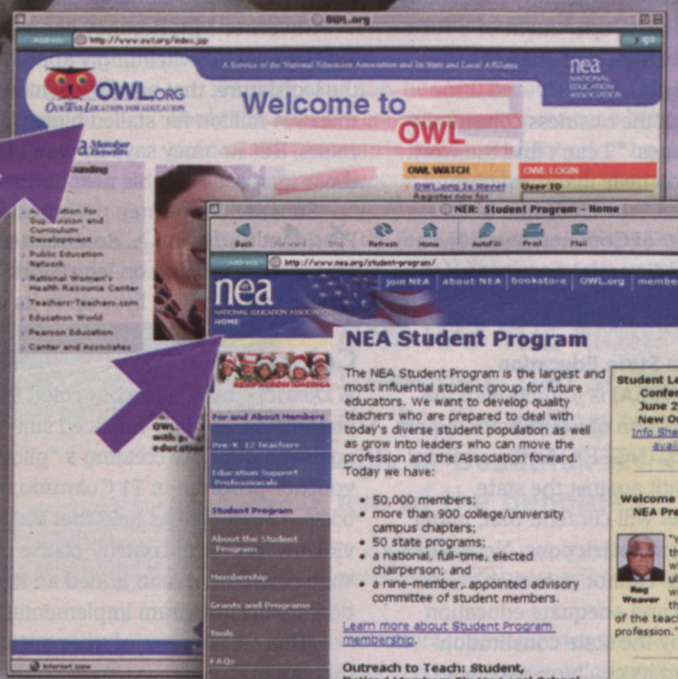
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50 state programs;
a national, full-time, elected chairperson; and
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About 180 Student Wisconsin Education Association members April 13 painted walls, created murals, and built shelves at Westside Elementary as part of their fifth annual "Outreach" event. NEA, the Wisconsin Education Association Council, and the Kimberly Education Association supported the event. [more...]
Annual Student Leadership Conference, June 26-29
Student Leadership Conference, June 26 - 29 New Orleans
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Pensions And Politics

Some lawmakers want to put your retirement security at risk. Don't let them do it.

John Jensen, who began teaching in 1967 in Omaha, Nebraska, at a salary of $5,700, is now a millionaire—of sorts.

Because he worked in a system with a guaranteed pension plan, Jensen, who retired last year, knows he'll get a monthly retirement check every month for life. The former president of the National Council on Teacher Retirement—and a man well-versed in the intricacies of retirement finances—Jensen recently sat down to calculate how much his pension is worth. "I figure that to buy an annuity that could guarantee the payments I now get for my lifetime would cost at least $1 million," he says.

Even if you're not knocking on the door of retirement, it's worth reflecting on the value of your pension—and fighting to preserve it—because many policy makers are pushing changes that would put your retirement security at risk.

The New Jersey Education Association, for example, recently sued the state for requiring districts to raise employees' contribution rate to the retirement system—but not fulfill its own obligation to the underfunded pension system. In other states, officials are cutting cost-of-living increases for those receiving a pension.

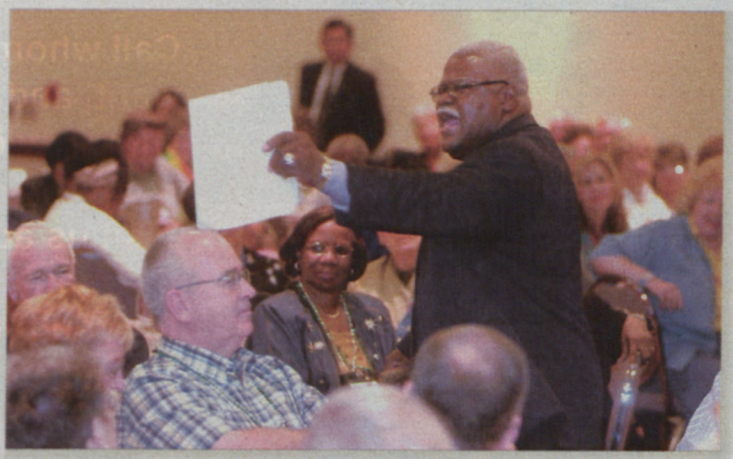
"Politicians are trying to balance their budgets on the backs of our members," says NEA President Reg Weaver. "We'll continue to fight for a secure retirement for dedicated public employees."

"We need to be vigilant," adds Jim Sproul, president of NEA-Retired, "or the pillars of retirement that our members count on—a good pension with cost-of-living increases, as well as health coverage—won't be there when they need them."

Another threat: efforts to phase out guaranteed defined-benefit pension plans (such as the one Jensen belongs to) and replace them with risky 401(k)-style retirement plans. (If you're not familiar with the perils of these systems, known as defined-contribution plans, ask someone who depends on a 401(k) how much of their retirement account money vaporized during the stock market swoon of 2000–02.)

Massachusetts Governor Mitt Romney last year proposed placing new educators in a defined-contribution plan, then backed down in the face of opposition from the Massachusetts Teachers Association and other groups. Experts predict that state legislators may try again this year to introduce legislation to cut back guaranteed pension systems and force some employees into these riskier plans.

Pension politics are rife at the national level as well. Analysts predict that President Bush will make privatizing Social Security a central plank of his re-election campaign. Not only would such a move be risky—Social Security recipients could get fewer benefits if their investments fare poorly—experts say the transition costs of converting to a new Social Security featuring private accounts would exceed $2 trillion. "Privatization will bankrupt Social Security," Lily Eskelsen, NEA Secretary-Treasurer, said at the recent NEA Retirement and Benefits Forum.



NEA President **Reg Weaver** discusses threats to pension security at last summer's NEA-Retired annual meeting in New Orleans. Membership in the fast-growing NEA-Retired program recently topped 210,000.

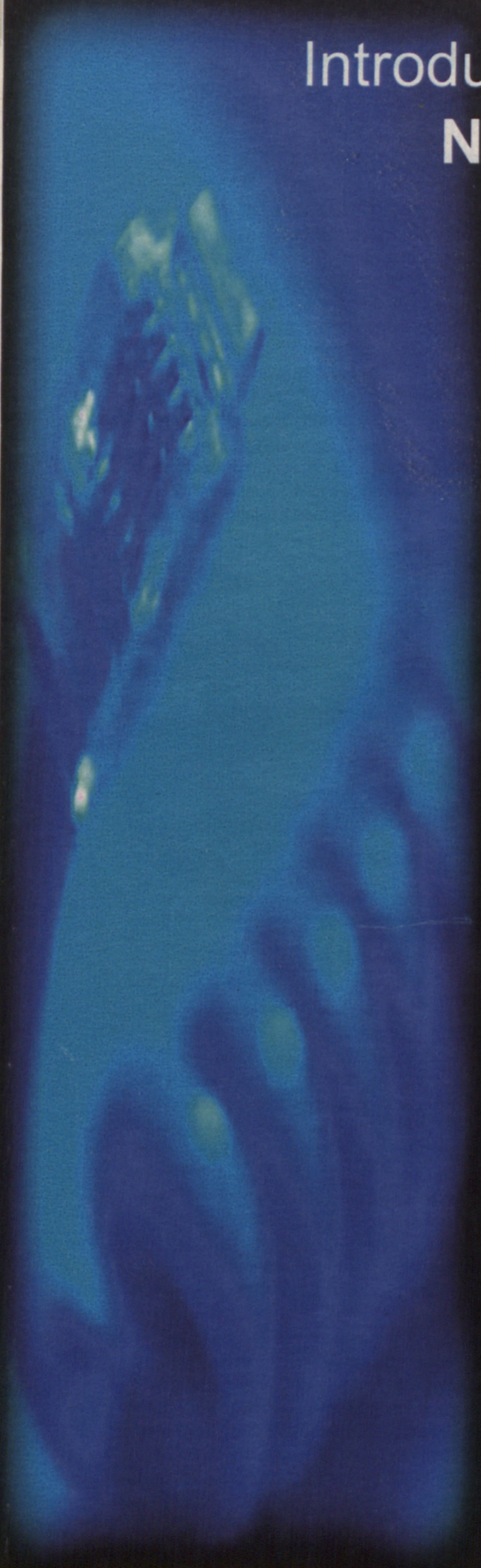
EVEN IF YOU'RE NOT KNOCKING on the door of retirement, it's worth reflecting on your pension—and fighting to preserve it—because many policy makers are pushing changes that would put your retirement security at risk.

Moreover, Congress has not yet acted to overturn the Government Pension Offset (GPO) and Windfall Elimination Provision (WEP), two laws that unfairly deny Social Security benefits to many retired public employees. At the retirement forum, participants were briefed on NEA's efforts to push Congress to repeal GPO and WEP, and they shared strategies for influencing legislation affecting retirement security at both the state and national level. (For more on NEA's drive to fix GPO/WEP, go to www.nea.org/lac/socsec.)

Ultimately, protecting your pension will depend upon influencing—or replacing—those who call the shots. "It's very important that we have policy makers who understand and support our issues, so our members will be able to enjoy their well-earned retirement and not suffer undue hardships," said Weaver. Retirement security for NEA members will rest, in part, on "who is in the White House and in the state houses."

—JOHN O'NEIL

PHOTO: CHUCK COOK



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Success Outside the Comfort Zone

A Colorado ESP local spreads its wings, building membership and earning the respect of school administrators.

NEA LOCAL AFFILIATE:

Cañon City (Colorado) Educational Support Personnel Association (CCESPA).

THE NUMBERS:

In the past year and a half, CCESPA has grown by 450 percent, to 98 members. "Our strength is in numbers, and these numbers speak for themselves!" says local President Judy Near, a health technician at Skyline Elementary.

WHO'S LISTENING:

Through membership and "relationship" building, CCESPA leaders have earned the respect of school board members and administrators and negotiated their first collective bargaining agreement. Cañon City school officials have rejected a management model, still popular in some Colorado districts, that boils down to treating education support professionals like second-rate citizens, intimidating or firing them for union activism, and violating their constitutional rights to free expression and association.

WHO GOT IT GOING:

Back in 2001, membership in this Rocky Mountain local was just above sea level. "There was fear and uncertainty out there," acknowledges CCESPA grievance chair John Butts, head custodian at Washington Elementary. With help from the Pikes Peak Education Association (PPEA), Butts and other CCESPA stalwarts started building a real NEA local affiliate, one "classified" employee at a time. Backed by a growing membership, a courageous group of activists—including Butts, Near, custodian Jason Jones, and secretary Cheryl Hutchinson—then requested official union recognition from the school board in May 2002.

HOW IT FELL TOGETHER:

"You could see those note cards shaking," recalls PPEA UniServ Director Misty Hart, "but these classifieds delivered a professional, eloquent message about teamwork." The school board was intrigued.

In long follow-up discussions with school officials, CCESPA leaders explained how they would represent *all* ESPs, why classifieds needed "equality" at the table with teachers, and why a negotiated contract—a bilateral written pact that can only be changed through mutual agreement—is superior to a top-down employer "policy."

These educators also explained how Association recognition would benefit schools and students. "When classifieds begin to feel they matter, that they have a purpose, they begin to perform even better," said custodian Jones. "Kids can't help but benefit as a result."

ON TO A FIRST CONTRACT:

With its burning questions answered, the school board voted unanimously in September 2002 to recognize CCESPA for the purpose of collective bargaining—if the local could prove, in a ballot conducted by the Colorado Department of Labor, that it represented a majority of ESPs. When that vote was conducted, 76 percent of Cañon City classifieds said "yes" to the Association.

By August 2003, CCESPA members ratified their first contract. It's a barebones document—bargaining over money will wait until this spring—but the agreement does include a dispute resolution procedure and provisions covering leave, holidays, and "maintenance" of existing benefits.

BANKING ON RELATIONSHIPS:

CCESPA members now have both a procedure to tackle issues as they arise—be it fair application of the dress code or compensation for work performed after the normal day—and a solid relationship with administrators that facilitates solutions.

These ESPs—**Jason Jones, Judy Near, John Butts,** and **Cheryl Hutchinson**—made local history by approaching their school board for union recognition.

"During the time we sought recognition, it was real important to prove to the administration that we were not out to 'headhunt,' but to make things better for the district," notes President Near. "Two school board members who initially opposed Association recognition changed their minds because they got to know, trust, and believe in us. Relationship building is the catalyst of getting where you want to go."

MAKING IT SAFE TO ADVOCATE:

There's no place for fear in an atmosphere based on respect and trust. As the comfort level of CCESPA members has increased, so has the scope and depth of Association leadership. This small local has a 14-member executive board, representing every ESP job category. "These leaders haven't been selected, they've just emerged!" says Near.

"They've taken one step beyond their comfort level," adds Jason Jones, the local vice president. That's because *this* Colorado district recognizes the right of ESPs to speak and act collectively.

—DAVE WINANS

FOR MORE, contact CCESPA President Judy Near at judyleenear@aol.com.

PHOTO: BRYAN KELSEN

In New Mexico, It's Politics With a *Difference*

By electing an education-friendly governor, NEA and AFT state affiliates gain pro-education legislation—and money to make it work.

New Mexico is fast becoming a textbook example of the positive things that can happen when supporters of public education come together to elect good politicians—and then work hard to make sure these leaders keep their campaign promises.

For seven years, the New Mexico Federation of Educational Employees (NMFEE) and NEA-New Mexico (NEA-NM), the state affiliates of the American Federation of Teachers and NEA, have developed joint legislative platforms and goals to pursue. But a roadblock remained even after these goals were achieved in the state legislature: the governor's veto pen.

WE'VE CREATED ONE strong public school employee message. And the success we've been able to have has been enormous.

—NEA-NEW MEXICO PRESIDENT EDUARDO HOLGUIN

All that changed in November 2002, when both unions, working in conjunction with the state AFL-CIO, went all out to elect Democrat Bill Richardson as governor. In just a year since taking office, Richardson has signed landmark bills reinstating collective bargaining rights for public employees and reforming the state's education system in ways that promote teacher quality and better schools.

Last autumn, the governor worked with the unions and other allies to get two education-related constitutional amendments passed, including one that will provide millions of dollars to fund the education-reform initiative and substantially raise teacher salaries.

Cooperation between NEA-NM and NMFEE has eliminated an obstacle that unions in other states often face: unfriendly lawmakers who pit labor groups against each other so that everybody loses. By working together for so many years, "We've created one strong public school employee message," says Eduardo Holguin, president of NEA-NM. "And the success we've been able to have has been enormous."

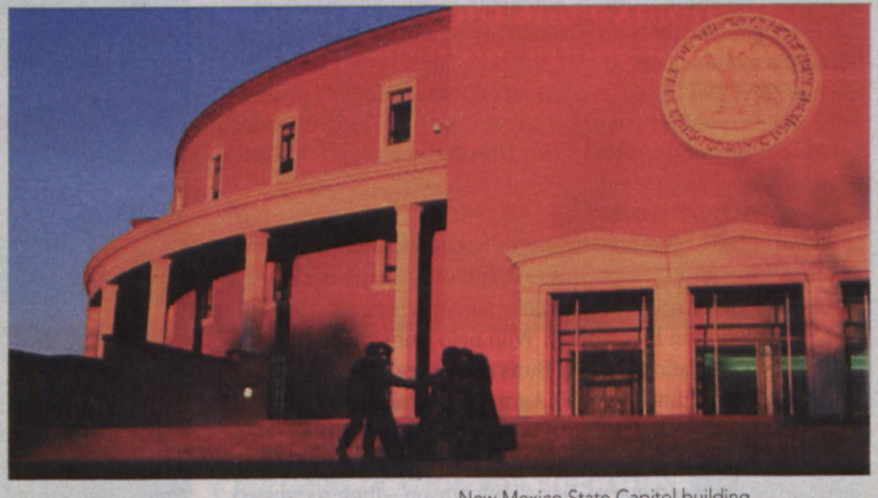
NMFEE President Christine Trujillo says passage of the collective bargaining bill stands out as a highlight of the joint efforts. "We were able to fend off efforts to include onerous language in that bill, and the outcome was a terrific piece of legislation," she says.

The most recent example of the unions' pivotal role in a key victory was the September 23 constitutional amendments election. An amendment increasing the percent of the state's permanent fund that will go to K–12 education over the next decade passed by fewer than 200 votes.

Both unions put substantial resources—human and financial—into passing that amendment, as well as another amendment that created a new position of state secretary of education. NEA-NM, for example, created a strategy called "Give Me Five," in which volunteers in each local union committed to getting five colleagues out to vote yes on the amendments. NMFEE's get-out-the-vote strategy also proved highly successful among its affiliates across the state.

By working together, the AFT and NEA state affiliates also have helped solidify a broader coalition in the state that has been pushing education reform for five years. The coalition supporting the reform measure—which includes a new three-tiered teacher licensing system and higher salaries—has involved associations representing school boards and administrators as well as business and community leaders.

The previous governor vetoed a version of the reform bill, but the coalition revived it—winning final passage and Richardson's signature in 2003. The same groups all supported the constitutional amendments.



New Mexico State Capitol building.

For once, Holguin says, the state now has in place a well-conceived combination of education reform legislation, changes in governance, and more money to make it all work.

As with any partnership, there are times when these NEA and AFT affiliates don't always agree on a given issue. But the relations are strong and predictable, with leaders meeting monthly even when the legislature isn't in session. Now they can deal with any disagreement and not let it stand in the way of a shared concern for the future of public education. nea

PHOTO: RICHARD CUMMINS

Florida State Faculty Give Union Landslide Victory

A 150-member organizing committee turns out the votes and turns up pressure for an end to 'political interference' on campus.

A recent vote by faculty and professionals at Florida State University (FSU) to elect the United Faculty of Florida (UFF) as their collective bargaining agent reaffirmed UFF chapter President Jack Fiorito's conviction that his colleagues at FSU see union representation as the best—and maybe the only—way to deal with the politically charged environment on that campus as well as at other public universities in the state.

In October, faculty and professionals at FSU chose UFF as their exclusive representative by a huge margin: 736 to 33. "This overwhelming faculty vote for the United Faculty of Florida shows convincingly that the FSU faculty wants a strong independent voice in the terms and conditions of employment," says Fiorito.

UFF is an affiliate of the Florida Education Association, the merged AFT-NEA state organization.

"It's clear [that] faculty want the protections of a contract to defend basic rights and to insulate themselves from political interference in the conduct of their professional lives," statewide UFF President Tom Auxter adds.

The vote at FSU brings to 10 the number of institutions in the 11-campus public university system where the faculty has chosen UFF representation.

The union has been representing the employees for years, but when Gov. Jeb Bush and the legislature reorganized the higher education system last year, they changed the status of the UFF. As a result, seven faculty chapters have successfully sought voluntary recognition from their university boards of trustees and three more have won elections. The only unit election yet to be held is at the University of Florida.

Why such a need to recertify UFF? Faculty perceive that many other challenges of university life have to do with the state's political environment, says Fiorito. He cites as an example his experience serving on the search committee that chose a former business partner of the chair of the FSU board of trustees as the president of FSU.

Another example that faculty point to is the disparity between administrative salaries, which are higher than those at comparable institutions, and faculty salaries, which are lower.

The UFF chapter had an organizing committee of 150. That structure, and UFF's success in reinstating payroll dues deduction—which had been lost in Gov. Bush's reorganization—was empowering, says John Kerbs, a union department representative. Kerbs, an assistant professor of criminology and criminal justice, notes that "bringing back dues deduction not only made membership more attractive and accessible, but it also helped potential members see UFF as a competent and strong union."

In the end, the voice of the faculty came through loud and clear, Auxter says. nea

Florida State University assistant professor **John Kerbs,** here talking to **Jennifer Jolley,** an organizing project representative for the United Faculty of Florida, says potential members see UFF as a "competent and strong union."

JUST IN TIME: A WAY TO FIGHT TUITION TAX CREDITS

Six states currently offer some form of tuition tax credit program to aid students attending private schools. But public education advocates expect legislative battles over tax credits and vouchers in every state in the years ahead. Tax credit/voucher proponents spread myths to promote their wares. Just two examples:

MYTH #1: Tuition tax credits help low-income students escape "failing" schools. The reality: In every state with tax credits, only the wealthy have benefited significantly from these giveaways.

MYTH #2: Tuition tax credits don't drain dollars from public school funding. The reality: In just one state, Illinois, the tax credit program cost $65 million in 2002—almost equaling the amount of the public education budget cut.

It's tough to outmuscle a myth. That's why NEA and AFT, through the NEAFT Partnership, have produced the **Toolkit for Fighting Tax Credit Vouchers,** which offers public education advocates facts and strategies needed to educate lawmakers and voters.

The toolkit includes a state-by-state analysis of how tuition tax credits have failed, sample speaking points for activists, sample letters and op-ed columns against tax credits, and detailed tips on how to lobby legislators—along with a wealth of general facts and figures about the costs of tax credits and their impact on public education funding.

The NEAFT Report is a project of the NEAFT Partnership. A primary aim of the partnership is to keep members of NEA and the American Federation of Teachers informed about joint programs and areas of common concern. These articles were written by AFT staff writers Dan Gursky and Barbara McKenna and *NEA Today*'s Matt Simon.

SAVING THE JOY

Reading proficiency may be the cornerstone of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, but educators say testing proficiency—and very little fun—may be the real order of the day. How some NEA members are pushing against the tide.

BY ALAIN JEHLEN

At New Stanley Elementary School in Kansas City, Kansas, reading is nothing short of an adventure in wonder—and it's apparent as soon as you walk through the school's great big door.

Kindergartners imitate geese to learn a letter sound. Second graders invent alternative plot endings to a story about a dragon. Older children discuss the implications of a book on whaling. In fact, every student engages in reading in a way keenly tailored to him or her. The result: remarkable academic progress that has made this predominately Hispanic school one of the area's showcase institutions. It was even recognized by the International Reading Association last year for its innovative instruction.

So why is New Stanley's principal worried?

It's called Adequate Yearly Progress, or AYP—the federal government's required standard for determining whether a school will be targeted as "needing improvement" and perhaps red flagged for sanctions.

"We barely made it," admits Sharyn Connor, referring to this much-ballyhooed hallmark of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), the so-called No Child Left Behind law. "Made it," she explains, only because of an obscure provision of the law that gives schools like hers a pass when test scores, though not quite up to standard, have risen sharply.

That "pass," of course, came last year. This spring, the state standards will get ratcheted up even more, and Connor fears New Stanley may not be able to keep up.

"When we're working as hard as we can, and as smart as we can, if we're hit with a score that says we don't make AYP, that's a blow," says Connor, an NEA member who spent many years as a classroom teacher before leading New Stanley. "It suggests we have not done our jobs as good teachers, when I know we have."

Across the country, from rural valleys to urban hubs, the sentiments of educators sound hauntingly similar. Yes, reading is critical, they say. And yes, kids deserve the attention needed to help them achieve their best.

But teaching reading well—and getting kids to love it, embrace it, know how to do it right—takes skill and thought, they say. It also takes time and support—from family, the community,

New Stanley kindergartners learn the "Animated Alphabet" as a fun start to reading.

from the government itself. And the latter is simply something many working under the heady pressures of the new federal law say is in short supply.

Not only does the law require that educators make every public school kid "proficient" in reading (and math) by 2014, it penalizes schools that don't make significant progress at points along the way. Already, just two years into the law, more than 25,000 schools have failed to make AYP for one year, and of those, 6,000 have been socked with a demoralizing "needs improvement" label. Most are now scurrying to save their reputations—in many cases good ones. But experts fear that, particularly in reading, their hurried strategies for "success" may be negatively impacting how reading is taught—indeed, how students of all ages come to experience this most joyous of learning opportunities.

And the fallout, they say, is not good.

"People are now so desperate to raise scores," says P. David Pearson, Ph.D., dean of education at the University of California at Berkeley and one of the nation's leading reading authorities, "that we could well end up with a nation of kids who can pass tests, but who can neither read critically nor enjoy the act of reading itself."

TEST(ING) DRIVE

In many places reading has become an exercise in drill and grill rather than exploration, and dedicated teachers see themselves working furiously against the wave. "I worry that kids today see reading as something they do only to pass a test or answer a teacher," says Jo Ben Whittenburg, who teaches at Jacox Elementary in Norfolk, Virginia. "I want to instill a love of reading, not a fear of testing."

PEOPLE ARE NOW SO DESPERATE to raise test scores that we could well end up with a nation of kids who can pass tests, but can neither read critically nor enjoy the act of reading itself.

—P. DAVID PEARSON

In addition, many educators are increasingly forced to turn to rote, scripted reading programs—those with ESEA-sanctioned "scientifically based" research behind them. "In a context of fear, someone says, 'This works!' and people march through the one program they think will save all kids," says Barbara Kapinus, NEA's reading specialist. Yet, she notes, years of studies have shown that "none of the programs supported by research works for *all* kids." Moreover, says Richard Allington, president-elect of the International Reading Association, many of these programs, which Title I schools must now adopt to get federal grants, actually undermine the expertise and autonomy of teachers themselves.

"How can you do higher level, thoughtful literacy instruction if the stakes are tagged to the ability of students to identify and isolate the same facts...to turn in the same data at the same time?" Allington asks. "The big ideas you're trying to get them to know fall by the wayside and you're no longer engaging brains and hearts and minds and souls of kids."

The pressures are even affecting the school communities as a whole. The new emphasis on test preparation has spurred a narrowing in many schools of curricula such as social studies and art. And educators and parents of struggling students—particu-

PHOTO: EARL RICHARDSON

Special Pressure

The "failure" of special needs kids to pass state exams has put thousands of schools on ESEA's "needs improvement" list—and put new pressures on an already vulnerable group.

BY SABRINA HOLCOMB

Raphael is proud of himself, and you can see it in the little slip of a grin he reveals as he checks out the "A" on his worksheet. He's just read an entire second-grade passage without any help from his teacher, and he knows it's a big deal. Six months ago he was only decoding words on a first-grade level.

But here at the Harmony Hills Elementary School in Wheaton, Maryland, Raphael's teacher is not celebrating just yet. In a month, her proud student will take the state reading exam, and she knows that all his hard work, all his progress, will likely not show up on his final score. That's because 10-year-old Raphael (not his real name) is technically in the fifth grade, and under the rules of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), will almost certainly be required to take the test at grade level. His score will then be tallied with those of the other special education kids and used to determine whether Harmony Hills has reached its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) mark.

Will the school make it? It's the million dollar question. Last year, because of the reading scores of its special education students—9 percent of the school population—this vibrantly diverse school did not pass muster. Now, like thousands of other schools across the country that "missed" AYP for the same reason, it has been flagged as "needing improvement," its name added to the dreaded public "watch" list.

Fair? For educators, parents, and a bevy of experts, the answer has been a resounding no. How, they ask, can students with learning disabilities show the progress they've made in class on rigid state exams? How can a fifth grader who reads on a second-grade level score as well as his general education classmates? So vociferous has been the hue and cry over questions like these that just last December, the U.S. Department of Education softened its stance and issued new rules. Now 1 percent of a school district's student population—and only those with significant cognitive disabilities—can take exams not considered at their grade level, and still have the scores count toward the district's AYP.

> Special education is the only group in our school that did not make AYP in reading. I feel like the spotlight is on us.
> —PAULA TEIXEIRA

It's a solid first step, say leaders at NEA and other education organizations who've pushed hard for reform, and it could go a long way toward reclaiming the good names of some schools that didn't make AYP last year. But that requires a thorough review of those schools' AYP scores, and NEA President Reg Weaver has strongly urged federal officials to conduct one quickly. "No school," Weaver says, "should be inappropriately labeled."

Even with such adjustments, say experts, the 1 percent rule won't even begin to affect the large number of students—the so-called "gap kids"—who still may need alternate assessments because of a range of other disabilities.

"These are not the most seriously impaired kids," says Nancy Reder, deputy executive director of the National Association of State Directors of Special Education. "But they still can't pass grade level tests. It's going to take them longer to make progress. They may eventually graduate from high school, but at a slower pace."

Patti Ralabate, NEA's special education specialist, agrees. "To expect all students with disabilities to be proficient on statewide assessments at the same level and at the same time as all other students is still unreasonable," she says. "The fact is that kids with disabilities should be measured on their progress, their gains—not against a grade level standard most of them can't meet." After all, she adds, most special ed kids are "special ed" precisely because they are academically behind.

A Pressure Cooker

For now, then, the gut-wrenching news about special ed kids "causing" schools to fail AYP may not slow all that dramatically. Last year, of the 151 Maryland schools that didn't make AYP, 80 failed based on the scores of students with disabilities. In South Dakota, 78 of 176 schools failed due to special ed scores. And statistics like those are begging the question among some educators and parents: Will teachers—or worse, special ed students—be made to feel they are the scapegoats, having "robbed" their schools of a

continues on page 28

Special ed teacher **Maria Brooks** invites more accountability, but not at the expense of "teachable moments" that help her kids learn.

PHOTO: SCOTT SUCHMAN

larly special education students whose performance on tests have caused large numbers of schools to fail AYP—are growing anxious that they will be the new scapegoats. As Paula Teixeira, a Maryland special education teacher, put it, "I feel the spotlight is on us." (See "Special Pressure," page 26.)

PUSHING AHEAD

Still, for all the frustration, educators everywhere are bearing up to try to meet the demands of the law. But they say they are struggling to balance what they know it really takes to help kids read—to love it, ponder meanings, make it a part of their lives—against ESEA's failure to recognize certain realities.

"I've been teaching 20 years, and I've been sort of amazed to watch kids get away from reading as a pastime," says Kizzi Elmore-Clark, a 12th-grade English teacher at Federal Hocking High School in rural Stewart, Ohio. "The irony is that our country holds up these old-fashioned values: We want our kids to be these great readers and thinkers. "But we forget," she says, that most families don't sit down to dinner anymore, that poverty and hunger loom, that kids come to kindergarten two and three years behind, that in many cases kids are not being groomed to even *want* to read because of the preoccupation with the Internet, video games, television, and movies.

Yet under ESEA, she says, schools are expected to make it all right—and fast—for everybody. Kids who don't speak English, kids who don't have books in their homes, kids who, like many of those she teaches, hail from a poor region in Appalachia (average family income $20,000). All must meet the same standard, at the same time.

Can they make it? It's the rare educator who will flatly say no. Instead, at places like New Stanley, Federal Hocking, Horace Mann Elementary in California, and dozens of others, they are simply biting the bullet with highly thoughtful literacy programs—some years in the making, some that tap the resources of nearby colleges and universities, all that put a premium on professional development, school-wide collaboration, and a commitment to keeping reading alive, joyous, and relevant—no matter what.

In many ways, experts say, these are the schools that have the most potential for producing *truly* proficient students—those who know how to read and actually want to do so. But whether even these showcase programs, with the critical advantages of having the support of parents and administrators, can do enough to "meet AYP" year after year, remains to be seen.

ayp MADNESS 101

Comprehending the complexities of ESEA and Adequate Yearly Progress can require some serious mental gyrations, so here's a primer to get you started.

First, understand that under the law it's not enough for an entire student body to meet the federal standard on test scores. Certain subgroups of students must meet the same standards. Those subgroups include special education students, English-language learners, low-income students, and members of major racial/ethnic groups—groups that on average often score lower on tests nationally. But how many students have to be in the subgroup before its scores can count against a school's standing? What if there's only one student in the group? Does the whole school sink or swim on the performance of that one student? Should it be two students? Ten?

The federal law leaves that decision up to the states. And in case you haven't figured it out, the states have come up with drastically different answers. Virginia picked 50 as its minimum subgroup size. But Maryland picked 5. Some states came up with complicated formulas and caveats. In California, for example, the minimum group size is 100, unless the group makes up at least 15 percent of the student body, in which case the minimum group size is 50. Needless to say, it all makes it impossible to judge how states are performing one to the next. "Comparing AYP results from state to state to state is more than just comparing apples and oranges," says Patti Ralabate, NEA's special education expert, "it's comparing apples, oranges, bananas, and kumquats."

Then there's this: Even if a subgroup is too small to count against the school's record, the scores still could keep an entire district from making Adequate Yearly Progress—which means that in some cases, all of a district's schools may make AYP, but the district itself does not, because of how the subgroup scores add up at the district level.

Add to this confusion the fact that minimum sample size for subgroups is really just one component used to chart AYP. When you factor in starting points, proficiency levels, participation percentages, and additional academic indicators, each of which varies from state to state, you start to understand why some schools feel they're being asked to pull rabbits out of hats.

PHOTO: ELI REICHMAN; ILLUSTRATION: JONATHAN EVANS

Special Pressure

Continued from page 26

passing mark? Already some are feeling the squeeze. As Paula Teixeira, the fourth-grade special ed teacher at Harmony Hills, puts it: "Special education is the only group in our school that didn't make AYP in reading. I feel like the spotlight is on us."

Parents are beginning to worry, too. "If our school is deemed a failure because my children can't pass the test" asks Donna Obermeyer, a parent in Olympia, Washington, "will they be unwelcome there?" Obermeyer has two children in special education programs—a daughter with learning disabilities and a son with high-functioning autism.

"The entire situation has turned into one big pressure cooker," laments Ralabate. "Dedicated teachers are frightened and disheartened, parents are worried that schools won't welcome their children, and special ed students—who already feel singled out—are now feeling demoralized."

Then, of course, there's the impact in the classroom, where teachers like Maria Brooks and Paula Teixeira do their jobs with palpable enthusiasm. The truth, they say, is that they actually like accountability, don't even have a problem with testing—or, for that matter, the intent of the federal law. Says Brooks, it "encourages high expectations for special education students and it encourages me to monitor my kids more closely."

Yet, she says, "it can be highly frustrating. The majority of my students have language processing problems. Not only do they struggle to decode words, they have difficulty articulating, comprehending, and understanding the connection between cause and effect."

But time seems to be running out, she and Teixeira agree, and they fear a stellar reading program that Harmony's principal has spent years developing may be undermined as they try to help their kids "catch up." Even before ESEA, they had their work cut out for them. Most of the students come from low-income families where English is spoken as a second language.

To meet the challenges, having "all hands on deck" has been the mantra. Educators get 13 hours per month of collaborative planning time built into their schedules. Grade-level teams that include general education, special education, and ELL teachers; paraeducators; a reading specialist; and a speech and language pathologist, review and discuss students' work and draft a two-week lesson plan that's posted on a schoolwide network.

> In Maryland, 80 of 151 schools not making AYP failed because of the scores of special ed students.

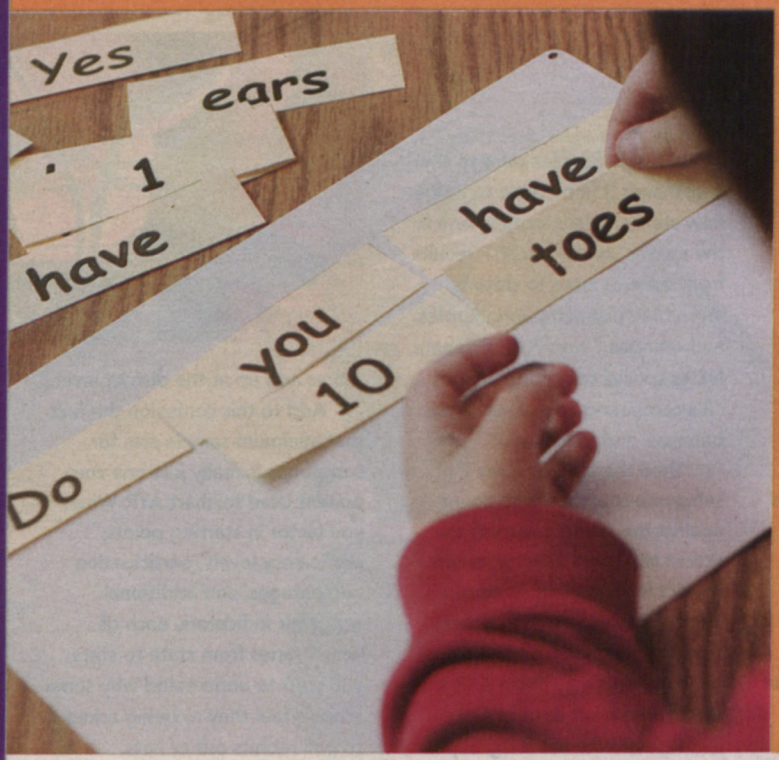


PHOTO: SCOTT SUCHMAN

Losing Teachable Moments

Yet these days when special education teachers sit down to plan and collaborate, the talk often turns to pressures, to how testing has changed the nature of what they do. They talk about losing teachable moments and their increasing use of drills. "In the past," says Maria Brooks, "if a student said something interesting about planets, I could stop and say, let's explore planets. But there's no time for that anymore. I have to focus on what's going to be on the test."

Even providing accommodations to ease the pressure can be tricky under ESEA. In some states, for example, test scores for thousands of students have been invalidated because the school personnel offered special assistance during a state exam that wasn't developed to allow such assistance. Yet those accommodations were required by their Individualized Education Programs (IEPs). Montgomery County, Maryland, where Harmony Hills is located, was particularly hard hit by this discrepancy. A number of the county's schools that failed AYP would have made it if they hadn't been penalized for giving students the accommodations called for in their IEPs.

Pat Steinberg, vice president of the Washington State Special Education Coalition, an advocacy group of parent and education organizations, says the law needs reshaping to focus on the needs of individual students. "Rigor is moving a special education student forward with increased complexity and difficulty so he or she can grow."

Since ESEA standards were implemented, for example, transition services to help students with disabilities move from high school to jobs have been curtailed. "It's a travesty to take away some students' ability to support themselves in the future," Steinberg says. "We have companies in this state that hire students with disabilities out of high school and pay them a living wage. But if the students can't graduate from high school—if they don't receive a degree because of ESEA standards—these companies can't hire them. Rigor is not giving kids something so hard they can't accomplish it. That's not rigor; that's killing them."

Kizzi Elmore-Clark works with her high school students on innovative ways to explore the meaning of books.

INDIVIDUAL ATTENTION

At New Stanley, literacy has been centerstage in part because of a six-year district-wide school improvement program called First Things First, which organizes schools in ways that build strong personal ties between children and their teachers. Each school accomplishes that in its own way, says principal Connor. There's no lock-step formula. But the results have been impressive: Test scores throughout the district have risen steadily, with scores for low-income and minority students rising fastest.

At New Stanley, where 85 percent of kids are eligible for free or reduced price meals, and where many are transient, teachers keep the same students for two years. And a year-round calendar gives children short breaks instead of one long summer vacation, although the total number of days is the same as at other schools. Connor says long periods away from school hurt at-risk students because "they're not read to and don't have as many books at home as children in other parts of the community. Many of the families speak only Spanish so they are not practicing their English at home."

To help, New Stanley offers evening English programs for its many immigrant parents. And in a novel twist, the school year begins with teachers visiting each new student's home.

When children come to class, they experience a bold and individualized reading program. The school phased out its basal readers years ago. Instead, the teachers pick and choose leveled materials that can engage their students—something the basal series failed to do, says Connor.

WHEN I TEACH A NOVEL I try to model what I do as a reader—where that takes me, how that makes me look at my life and what I do. By voicing those things and kicking off discussions, students start actually thinking about what they read—which is the point.

—KIZZI ELMORE-CLARK

To get started on the road to literacy, kindergartners experience the "Animated Alphabet." On one sunny day last December, they were meeting the character "Gilda Goose," who glides, and all the kids flapped their arms, giggling. Meanwhile, second graders explored text at many different skill levels. One group read about a princess who figured out how to trick a dragon that wanted to eat her, and then developed alternative strategies she could have used.

In fifth grade, where the vocabulary is tougher and the thinking more complex, children pondered a book about Greenpeace's campaign to stop whaling. Next door in the computer

PHOTO: CHRIS CROOK

New Stanley's **Elizabeth Hanscum** tries to make learning to read a happy experience for her kindergartners.

lab, a second grader who read at the seventh-grade level was creating an electronic slide presentation on Huckleberry Finn.

Still, as comprehensive as the program is, it is constantly being refined. A committee of half a dozen teachers and the principal plan weekly professional development sessions dealing with whatever the teachers feel is currently the greatest need.

NEA's Barbara Kapinus says this kind of teacher-directed professional development geared to the needs of their students is a hallmark of great reading instruction. "We need a whole repertoire of strategies to address different students who will learn to read in different ways," she says. "If teachers don't have access to professional development that allows them to recognize what works best for an individual student, and to develop instruction that addresses that, we will have a bunch of kids whom we will continue to leave behind."

That's certainly true at Horace Mann Elementary in Glendale, California, near Los Angeles, an over-crowded, 1,200-student school that has a different kind of year-round schedule, one that makes maximum use of each room. Nine hundred students attend classes at a time, while the others are on vacation.

"When I started 30 years ago, I allowed the text to determine what I was teaching and what the kids would do. I don't do that any more," says Marcie Kreditor, one of three literacy specialists who lead professional development and model advanced teaching strategies for the rest of the staff.

Like New Stanley, Horace Mann serves a high proportion of low-income immigrants, although here the home language is as likely to be Armenian as Spanish, and some students speak Russian, Korean, or Tagalog.

Ana Tamm, another Horace Mann reading specialist, says it's even more important for teachers at such a school to individualize instruction because their children vary more than at an affluent, English-speaking school.

Sixth-grade teacher Erin Welch says her students may be reading anywhere from the kindergarten to ninth-grade level. Designing the right approach for each child keeps her too busy to worry much about the federal rules. "I worry more about the 31 bodies in my room. That's the reason I get up in the morning—to meet their needs and get the maximum growth I can with each one. I'm not saying to myself, 'Oh, boy, those scores must come up!'"

Of course, it helps that so far, Horace Mann has managed to stay ahead of the AYP target.

HIGH SCHOOL CHALLENGES

Federal Hocking is trying to get there—but not because reading hasn't been a focus of learning. In fact, so studied has been the focus, that all but the school's special education students passed the state assessment last year. Which means the school didn't make AYP and which makes the principal George Wood concede that attention to test preparation for that group may be needed. But test prep is hardly what the school has valued.

What it values, says Wood, a nationally recognized educator whose innovative school has racked up a bevy of awards, is helping kids learn how to make something of what they read, and be buoyed by it. "If we really want to close the achievement gap, the work has to be around reading—and not reading for testing, but real reading," he says. "Being able to read text in multiple fields for meaning, being able to question what you are reading in a thoughtful manner, being able to read fluently over an extended period of time."

That's why teaching reading in high school can get particularly tricky—and quite challenging, he says. "In high school, reading is often the great separator," Wood says. "Until high school, a lot of reading is high interest stuff." Then the tenor

PHOTO: EARL RICHARDSON

shifts "and you don't get a lot of page-turners," in many cases because of textbooks that are "more technical, more dense," explains Wood. "The language is at a higher level, and you have to persist at it more," he goes on. "Teachers have to be purposeful at it, too, but many tend not to be. We tend to stop halfway through middle school."

But not at Federal Hocking. Teachers have long worked at presenting reading as a lesson beyond the book and have now launched a literacy campaign that builds on the emphasis by honing reading skills across content areas—with books and materials that thrill.

For years in Kizzi Elmore-Clark's class, for example, students act out their novels and plays; they draw; they discuss; they think about their own relationships to the works. And they have fun doing it.

"What I tend to do is a whole lot less lecturing and a lot more questioning," she says. "When I teach a novel I try to set it up and model what I do as a reader—what I'm thinking, where that takes me, how that makes me look at my life and what I do. By voicing those things and kicking off discussions, they start actually thinking about what they read—which is the point."

Because her school is inclusionary—there's no grouping by ability, no separating out of special needs kids—she challenges her kids to do the best they can.

"I like to tell them to envision a pond and then I tell them to let their stones sink. Most start off skipping their stones across the top—they don't let what they read digest. But I tell them if we all jump into that pond and all get wet, yes, only some of the stones will go to the bottom. But all of us will get something from the discussion and the ideas and they'll take that with them to the next thing we read.

"I think it works better than anything else I've done," she says.

Now, to bolster that work, she and the other teachers are getting some lessons on how to better build reading skills for students studying not just English, but math, science, and social studies, too. The school has begun working with two education professors from National Louis University in Chicago, Illinois—Harvey Daniels and Steve Zemelman, authors of a newly released book on content area reading. (See "Help with Reading," page 53.)

The idea, says Daniels, is that students not only need to be shown strategies to attack reading, but they need a "healthier,

continues on page 34

During one of their regular team meetings, third-grade teachers at Harmony Hills discuss student progress and exchange helpful reading tips.

top 10 TIPS TO SPICE UP YOUR READING PROGRAM

In Your Classroom

1. LOOK for patterns of strengths, achievement, and needs in the work of individual students. Group students and plan instruction and assignments accordingly.

2. USE higher level questions to guide discussions and writing assignments related to what students read. Questions should have more than one right answer and should require a re-reading of the text for support information.

3. HAVE students develop a dictionary to carry with them. Students put words on index cards with a rubber band or ring to hold them together. The word is on one side of the card, and the definition and the word used in a sentence is on the other side. Students can use the cards to sort and categorize words.

4. READ aloud to students *no matter what level you teach.* It helps to model and foster an appreciation of reading and demonstrate fluency. Also, prep special ed students or other struggling students who might need extra help by pre-teaching vocabulary and basic concepts.

In Your School

5. START a teacher-led study group. Look at students' work in an area that needs improvement, and choose an instructional strategy for group members to implement. For possible strategies to use, visit www.nea.org/reading.

6. BUILD in collaboration time so that special and general education teachers, speech and language pathologists, and reading specialists can plan and work together.

7. COMPILE a list of the common terms used on statewide assessments and disseminate to all instructional staff members. Post the vocabulary on charts in every classroom. Encourage teachers to use this terminology in their lessons so that students are familiar with it.

In the Community

8. INVOLVE parents and caregivers by asking them to read to or with their children every day for at least 15 minutes. Give them a chart or calendar to keep track of minutes read and books shared.

9. ASK community members such as public servants, local athletes, news announcers, business leaders, and retirees to read to a class at your school. Aim for a guest reader in each classroom once a month.

10. LINK to libraries in the community to encourage reading for pleasure outside of school and to create a synergy between classroom/school activities and library programs. Just ask the librarian whether they can do story time or a book "exhibit" on the subject you're teaching.

PHOTO: SCOTT SUCHMAN

WOW YOU REALLY WROTE THAT?

BY ANITA MERINA

School visits by authors like Christopher Myers enchant even older readers—and they work wonders in forwarding the goals of **NEA's Read Across America:** to motivate kids to plunge into the wonderful world of books.

Smack in the middle of a bustling afternoon at Thomas Jefferson Middle School in Arlington, Virginia, Christopher Myers surrounds himself with a gangly group of seventh-grade students. He talks enthusiastically about his books on Harlem, the blues and basketball, about his powerful, award-winning illustrations. Then to the students' great pleasure, he invites them to draw sketches of him from any angle they desire. Satisfied his profile has made an impression—the funny, creative sketches certainly tell the tale—he dashes to the auditorium to chat it up with eighth graders about reading and writing and everything middle school.

Just another day in the life of an author who believes in connecting with kids where it often matters most—front and center, face to face.

Myers, with his gritty, colorful collages of urban life couldn't be more different than Dr. Seuss and his fanciful drawings of imaginary sneetches and grinches. But in this centennial year of the fetching Seuss, Myers reminds us that his connection to the icon of reading is much the same as it is for his own famous father, acclaimed author Walter Dean Myers: All of them use words and pictures to reach the toughest of audiences—young readers.

Around the country, NEA members will celebrate writers like Christopher Myers and Dr. Seuss on March 2, Dr. Seuss's birthday, with reading events that ask people from all walks of life to put on their reading hats and share a book with kids. Connecting kids of all ages year-round with everything from resources to book lists with authors like Christopher Myers has become the hallmark of NEA's Read Across America project.

On this day at Thomas Jefferson, reading specialist Anne Godfrey couldn't be more pleased. "At the middle school age, it's even more important to find ways to motivate kids to read," says Godfrey, who coordinates the reading program. "Bringing in an author like Christopher Myers gives students a chance to talk and learn about their books and about the importance of reading and writing in the author's life."

As part of her efforts to connect authors and readers, Godfrey works with the school librarian to create displays about the author's work. And she talks with teachers about the books and ideas expressed by the author, all in preparation of the author's visit.

"Ideally, we spend a great deal of time creating the right reading climate for the students and the authors," says Godfrey.

That's music to the ears of author and poet April Wayland, author of *Girl Coming in for a Landing*, a novel in poems popular with older readers. Wayland is also a founding member of the Children's Authors Network, a group of authors and illustrators who visit schools on the West Coast and offer their tips on their Web site, www.childrensauthorsnetwork.com. "What we like to see is a

Dos and Don'ts of Author Visits

do

CREATE A PLANNING CALENDAR AND PLAN EARLY. Give yourself plenty of time to contact the publisher, arrange the author visit, create displays, and offer books for the students to read.

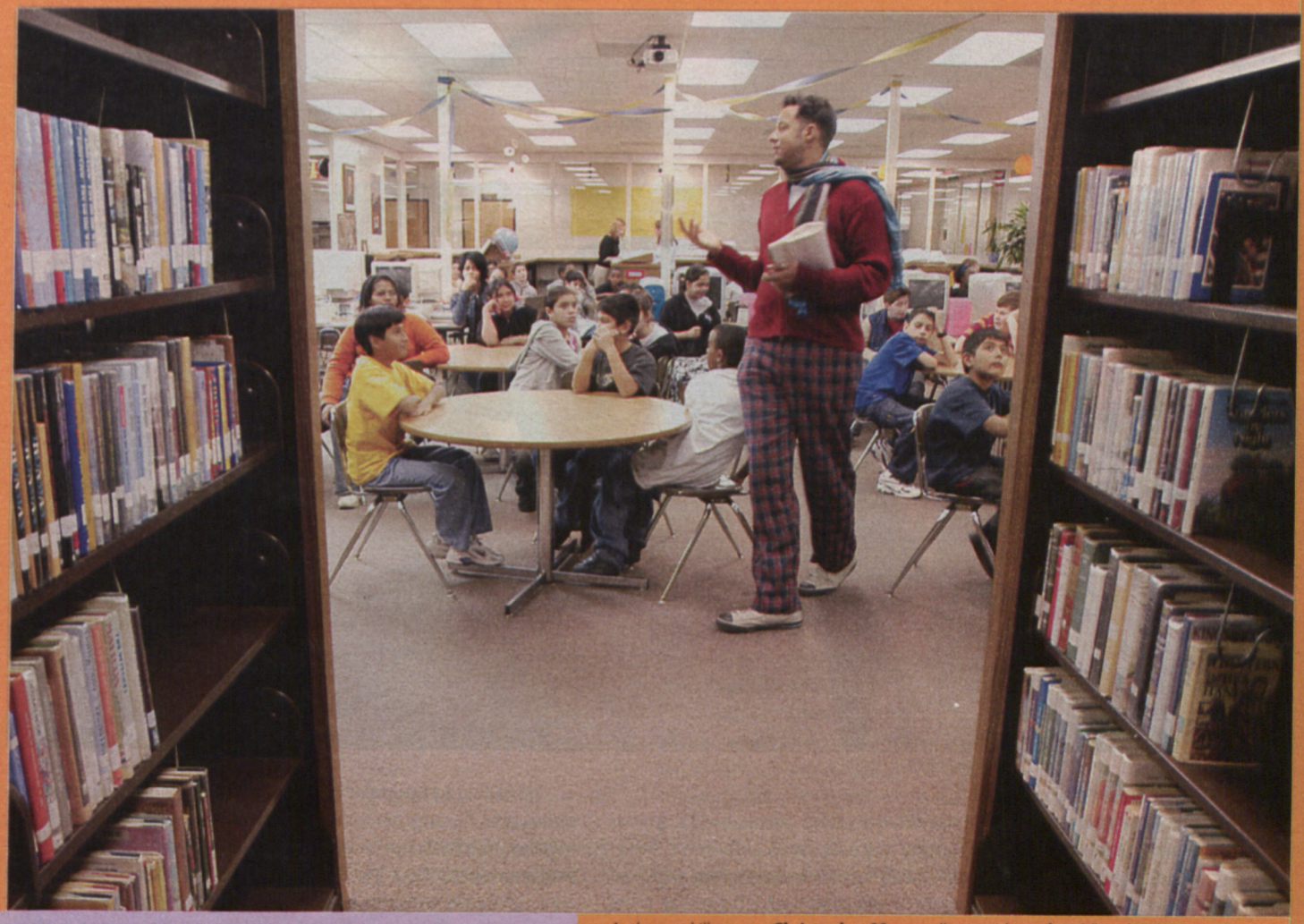
DO YOUR RESEARCH ON THE AUTHOR. Make sure students are familiar with the author's books. There's nothing like a sea of blank stares to frustrate an author.

WORK WITH LOCAL AUTHOR GROUPS. The Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators has local and regional chapters. Go to www.scbwi.org to locate them.

ENGAGE THE ENTIRE SCHOOL, including the administration. This will pave the way for grant money for the visit, support for your program of visits, and activities for all classrooms.

PRIME THE PUMP. Talk to students ahead of time about the author and the books to help create engaging questions and exchanges for author and students.

BUILD A WELCOMING ATMOSPHERE FOR THE AUTHOR'S VISIT. Author Pat Mora recalls a school that created a path of confetti (in honor of her book, *Confetti*), lined the hallways with student illustrations of her book, and hosted an autograph party filled with students eager to talk with her about her work.



Author and illustrator **Christopher Myers** talks to a class of middle school students about his work as a way to motivate them to read and write.

don't

DON'T LIMIT YOURSELF WHEN IT COMES TO SELECTING AUTHORS.

DON'T ALLOW YOUR STUDENTS TO COME UNPREPARED. Author Hudson Talbott relates the experience of bringing the subject of his book, a Holocaust survivor, to a series of classrooms, only to find both the students and teachers completely unfamiliar with his book or the heroics of his book's subject. It was a missed opportunity for all.

DON'T FORCE STUDENTS INTO ASSIGNED READING OF SECTIONS OF THE BOOK AT A TIME. One author recalls visiting students who had been force-fed his book by sections, so that they had tired of it by the time they finished.

DON'T LEAVE EVERYTHING UNTIL THE LAST MINUTE. You might miss a key detail, like who will pick the author up, or who will arrange for the books to be available.

DON'T FORGET THE FOLLOW-UP. Make sure you follow-up with the publisher on the visit and write thank you's to the author.

school that prepares students for the author's visit by featuring the author's work and setting up the presentation well in advance," says Wayland. "There have been times when schools and classrooms have been completely unprepared for the visit and the students lose out."

Award-winning writer Nikki Grimes, author of *The Bronx Masquerade*, agrees. "There's nothing more disheartening than to do a reading and not register with students because they have no connection to your book or your work."

Of course, on this day, Christopher Myers isn't having that problem. He explains why his books are so different than books he grew up reading. "I never saw books that showed my city, Brooklyn, or my world or experiences," Myers tells the audience of eighth graders. "I began writing because I wanted to show readers what I saw, and what I knew. I wrote about the city of Harlem and set my stories in Brooklyn because it was what I knew and what I wanted other people to understand, not just what they heard on TV or knew from friends."

Then he asks: "Don't you want people to know where you're coming from?"

The students, a racial and ethnic melting pot, nod their approval and push Myers to tell them more. When he finishes, they surround him offstage, lobbing questions left and right. And Godfrey smiles, knowing the day has been a success.

PHOTO: SCOTT SUCHMAN

continued from page 31

more grown-up" diet of materials to read—trade books, magazine articles, nonfiction works, journals, book club news, Internet articles. "Our big emphasis is on changing the diet and reducing the dependency on textbooks," which for the most part, he says, serve as "reference" books.

Introducing a popular book such as *Fast Food Nation* in a science class, he says, provides opportunities to talk about biology, viruses, nutrition—even labor union issues and points of view—while undergirding the established curriculum. "You cannot have students come to school and spend six hours with their noses over stuff they can't read or relate to....They need a whole collection of materials that engage them."

And how do the teachers learn to make the use of these materials a daily affair? At Federal Hocking, instead of isolated workshops, teachers will soon be gathering in the class of a select peer every two months or so to observe a lesson actually being taught by Zemelman or Daniels, along with the classroom teacher. They'll get briefed before and after about specific tools and how to make the lesson work, then go back to their own classes that same day to try them out.

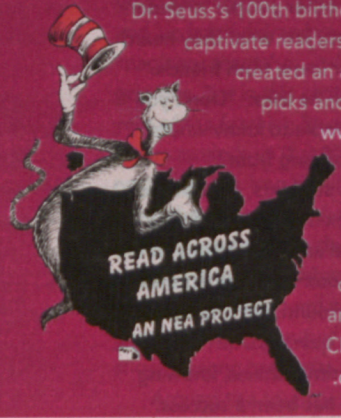
"Teachers have to learn how to teach kids how smart readers think," Daniels says, "but they have to open them up using small pieces of text they can actually read." The more kids read because they can, he adds, "not only do they begin to gather tons of facts and vocabulary words, they acquire all kinds of cultural knowledge." Ironically, he notes, vocabulary and topic familiarity have been shown to be key predictors of success on reading tests. But the real gift, he says, "is that they become thoughtful and curious citizens who like to read and share ideas."

And teachers agree. "Where schools do drill and grill, the kids will be damaged and teachers will end up hating what they do," says Elmore-Clark. "More than anything they will have missed a wonderful opportunity to build the kind of caring community that is trying to make thinkers of our kids. And isn't that what we really want?" nea

Marilyn Milloy contributed to this report

Celebrate Authors, Celebrate Books!

What's the favorite book of teen author Laurie Halse Anderson? Why is *Little House on the Prairie* the favorite of Hispanic author Pat Mora? What does *Harry Potter* author J.K. Rowling recommend? In honor of Dr. Seuss's 100th birthday and the many authors whose books captivate readers of all ages, NEA's Read Across America has created an authors' favorite book list, offering author picks and the reasons for their selections. Go to www.nea.org/readacross for more information. You'll also find additional book lists to use in your classroom or your read-in. For more information on author visits, there are a number of rich resources. Check out the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, www.scbwi.org, or go to the Children's Authors Network, www.childrensauthorsnetwork.com.



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a rainbow SOMEWHERE? (AH, YES.)

Before she was the award-winning producer of PBS' *Reading Rainbow*, Twila Liggett was first a music teacher and active NEA member. In celebration of **NEA's Read Across America**, Liggett talked with *NEA Today* about what it takes to get kids to love reading; the future of reading in an age of high-stakes testing; and about her show—a 20-year wonder that celebrates the joy of reading.

Twila Liggett

Is the focus on testing different from when *Reading Rainbow* started 20 years ago?

It's sadly similar. There was so much emphasis on measuring progress and completing lengthy forms on objectives that I remember once making a cryptic remark that by the time we filled out all of the objective sheets with the children, they would have lost the sheer joy of reading. So it grieves me today to talk to many of my former colleagues, who say they don't have enough time to help students enjoy and embrace learning and reading.

Is the move toward testing kindergartners a good thing?

That really makes me sad. At a time when kids need longer periods of time to interact with parents and teachers about the sheer excitement of recognizing words and letters and ideas, along comes a test. It doesn't take a test to evaluate a kids' progress. At the rate we're going, I fear we'll be raising an a-literate nation—one of children who'll know how to read but will simply not care to.

Can educators do anything to thwart this trend?

They can ask Congress to consider what really helps children learn—from parents who are willing and able to read to their children to teachers who create rich, integrated programs that motivate kids. You can't always test for that. You can't measure the joy of reading or teaching that makes learning fun.

How did you start your show?

I was working with the Nebraska Educational Television Network, and they wanted to create a new children's show—but one different from the many that concentrated more on methodology. I had just finished my doctorate and had held a position as the state's reading instruction director and wanted to see a children's television show that focused on the wonderful world of books and reading.

How does the show support the work of classroom educators?

The show is thematically driven, and context is everything. We start with a great children's picture book, one that's chosen carefully by a team of educators and librarians and thoroughly "kid-tested" by young readers. We're able to use the original art of the book to tell the story. Then we expand the book into the children's own lives as (host and co-producer) LeVar Burton takes them on a journey into a tropical forest, for example. Children refer to these trips as if they had hopped on a plane with us.

Finally, there's the book review in which kids share their own favorite books and explain the book's appeal. Early on, we felt it was important to talk directly to kids—and who better than other kids?

So these sorts of discussions undergird teaching curricula?

Yes. Currently, 50 percent of our shows have been matched to the National Standards and we're hard at work on aligning the remaining programs. We'll begin to look at state standards as well.

We also have a strong family literacy program and will soon produce Spanish language materials. We felt it was important to provide this service to parents and educators because shows like these don't have to be dismissed out of hand because they don't work with a required text. We have a rich collection of books and videos and materials that can act as great tools for the home and classroom.

Is writing something you emphasize?

Absolutely. In fact, we sponsor a Young Writers and Illustrators contest that each year motivates up to 50,000 children to write and illustrate their own stories. Eleven percent of PBS viewers are educators who use this program in their homes and classrooms. A number of studies, including research released last year, showed that *Reading Rainbow*'s strategies are key in literacy development and preventing reading difficulties in young children.

Are there barriers to keeping shows like yours up and running?

Believe it or not, *Reading Rainbow* continues to struggle for funding, so educators should feel free to contact their local PBS station or member of Congress.

They can also tell us how they use the program in their classrooms or with their family literacy programs by e-mailing us at Rrainbow2@unl.edu. We collect these examples as a key part of our research on such topics as early literacy and reading motivation, which educators can find at www.readingrainbow.org.

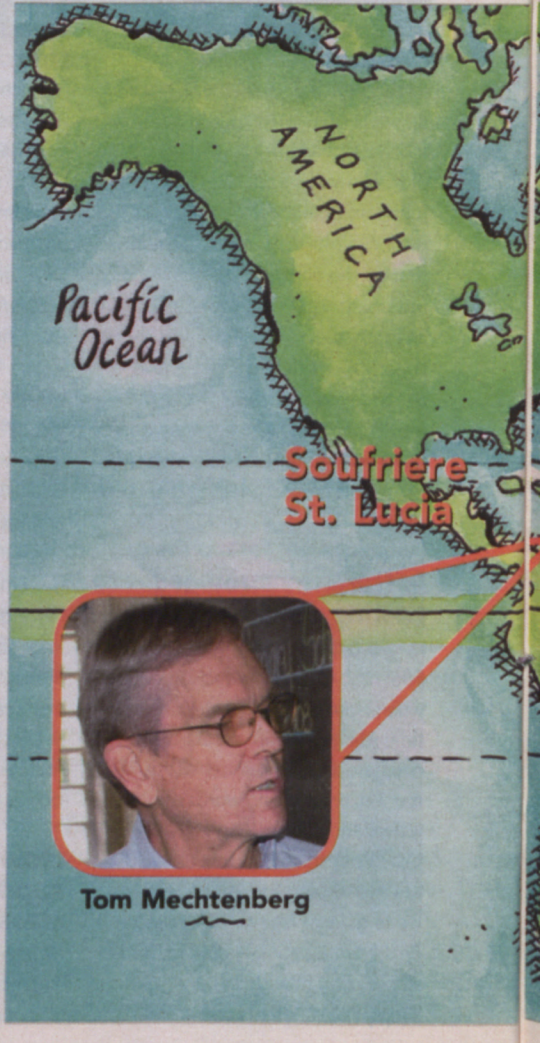
PHOTO: LEO SOREL

Going Global

Want to see the world—and help kids at the same time? These NEA-Retired members are continuing a lifetime of public service—while seeing the world with new eyes.

BY JOHN O'NEIL

It was the baby boomers—fresh from college and full of idealism—that John F. Kennedy called to service when he launched the Peace Corps in 1961. Four decades later, boomers looking to reinvent retirement are once again trekking across the globe to make a difference in the lives of the less-privileged. We talked to NEA-Retired members serving children and their fellow educators in far-flung spots around the world: India, Thailand, Tanzania, and St. Lucia. A snapshot of what they're doing—and what they've learned.



KOLKATA, INDIA

WHEN NEW JERSEY MEMBER ROSALIE GIFFONIELLO arrived in Kolkata (formerly Calcutta) in 1999 to work with Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity for eight weeks, the conditions facing orphaned children with disabilities shocked the former speech therapist.

"The kids were lying on the floor on mats or in cribs all day long," she says. "No stimulation. The kids had potential, but no one recognized it." During her service, Giffoniello taught some of the children to feed themselves or walk for the first time. And she decided to make a personal, life-altering commitment to the children of Kolkata's slums. "When I went home, I took early retirement from my job, gave away my possessions, and returned to Kolkata for good," she recalls.

Since then, Giffoniello, with friend Janet Grosshandler-Smith, has launched the nonprofit Empower the Children (ETC), which sponsors six small but vital programs to aid the destitute and disabled in Kolkata.

The "pavement school," for example, serves about 30 homeless children ages

4–16 who live on the streets, begging to survive. Until recently, the lessons took place right on the streets, but Giffoniello found space on the roof of a building. The children get lessons, lunch, and regular access to a mobile clinic. "We try to slowly reorient the children from the street to the classroom," Giffoniello explains. "You have to be patient, because the kids need a lot of attention. But, slowly, they begin to change their perception of themselves from beggars to students."

Giffoniello herself teaches children ages 3–5 in an innovative preschool class designed to stimulate children's creativity. The program uses curriculum materials developed by friends of ETC in New Jersey. Another ETC program provides two hours of tutoring in a coaching center for 15 girls from some of the poorest slums of Kolkata. Giffoniello teaches each Saturday at yet another program, a home for 50 young adults with mental and physical disabilities. On the drawing board: a new orphanage that will serve 30 boys. In the midst of some of the most impoverished conditions in the world, "We're trying to give them their childhoods back," Giffoniello sums up.

Rosalie now lives in Kolkata nearly year-round, returning to the United States primarily to see her family and friends; to speak about ETC's work to schools, colleges, and community groups; and to raise money to support ETC's work. Her message: "If you're

Rosalie Giffoniello took early retirement and launched a nonprofit to aid the children of Kolkata, India.

MAP ILLUSTRATION: PHOTODISC; PHOTOS IN MAP: VISUAL DOMAIN, LTD. (ST. LUCIA), PRAVASH PRADHAN (INDIA); PHOTO TOP: PRAVASH PRADHAN

more caring for others, you're bringing the world one step closer to peace."

And she says she welcomes volunteers to India to help out. Last year, she worked with 16 volunteers from the United States, Canada, France, and the United Kingdom. Several of them were making their second or third visit to serve the children of Kolkata.

"This is a perfect opportunity for a retired teacher," Giffoniello says. "Our volunteers say this is a life-changing experience. They go to sleep each night feeling very gratified that they're making a difference."

For more information, contact Empower the Children, 7 Ryans Way, Jackson, NJ 08527 or e-mail Rosalie at giffoniello@hotmail.com.

ARUSHA, TANZANIA

IN THIS DESPERATELY POOR AFRICAN NATION, where teachers often lack books and 100 primary-grade children may cram into a single classroom, Nebraska member Mary Jo Huelle works to keep alight a small beacon of hope.

The Mwangaza Teachers' Center (mwangaza is Swahili for "enlightenment"), which Huelle and her colleagues helped to build in 1997, represents a step forward for Tanzanian teachers, who must cope with shortages of materials and few avenues to improve their skills. Huelle first went to Tanzania in 1996 as part of a teacher exchange project run by the Lutheran church. She returned in 1997 and again for six weeks last summer to help construct two new additions to the center: a seminar room and a hostel wing that will provide lodging for teachers who travel from other parts of the country for training.

Mary Jo Huelle works with Tanzanian teachers at the Mwangaza Teachers' Center.

It's the latest accomplishment of the Mwangaza Education for Partnership project, which operates teacher exchanges and training programs aimed at helping teachers enhance their skills. Although some Tanzanian teachers hold college degrees, many do not, and training opportunities are scarce.

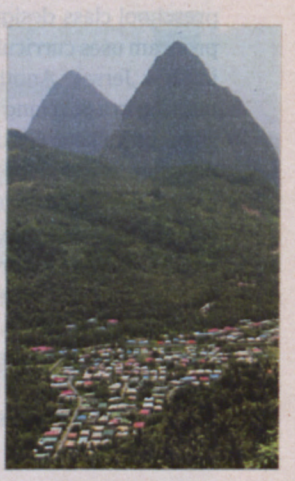
Huelle points to Tanzanian teachers like John Kavishe, who "considered himself a mediocre teacher" before participating in the program's training. After going through the training, he announced to his fellow students and staff, "You don't know me anymore, because I have been transformed." He now serves as a facilitator supporting other teachers receiving training, says Huelle.

Huelle, who retired last year after 32 years as a teacher in Gering, Nebraska, now serves as president of Friends of Mwangaza, a nonprofit that supports programs at the Mwangaza center. Since her first trip to Tanzania, she's been back three more times to help out—spending about $2,500 of her own money for each six-week visit.

"I return because the needs are so huge; you do so little, yet it means so much because it can help change children's lives," she says. "Education is the only thing that's going to make things better for them."

For more information about the work of Friends of Mwangaza, contact Huelle at mhuelle@actcom.net.

SOUFRIERE, ST. LUCIA



WHILE WESTERN TOURISTS BASK IN the sun and gorgeous scenery of this jewel of the Caribbean, Peace Corps volunteer Tom Mechtenberg is on a more serious mission: improving the odds for St. Lucian students with special needs.

"Their education system has never had a special program of any sort for children with mild or moderate mental or learning disabilities," says Mechtenberg, a former school social worker from Port Huron, Michigan. "Those kids have been left on their own in the regular classroom. Most teachers have at least 30 students in their classes, so they weren't getting any kind of special attention."

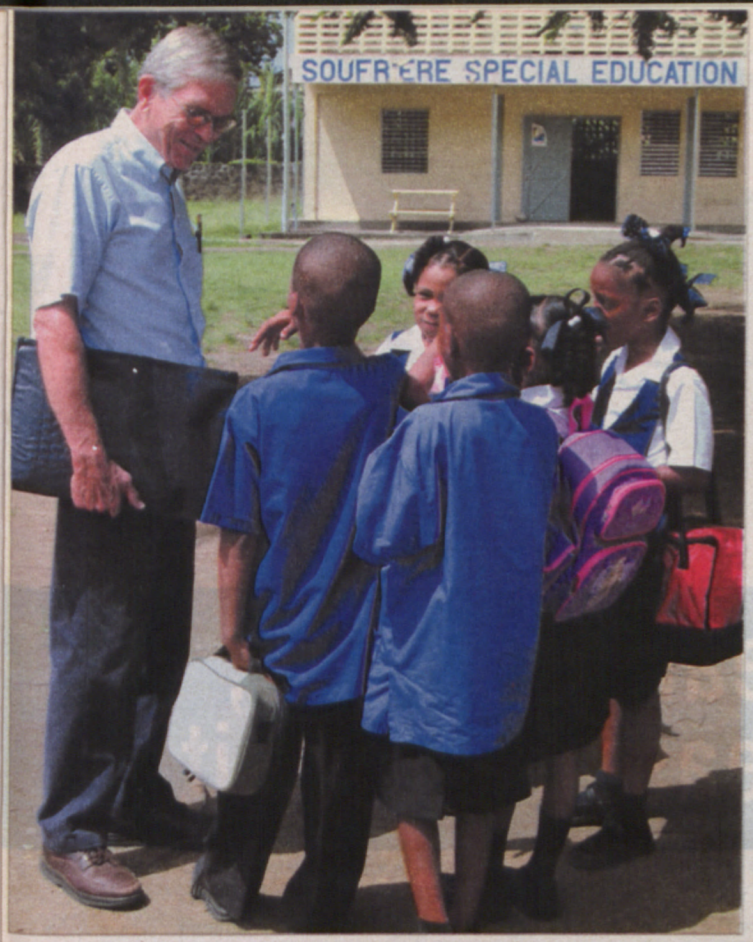
Mechtenberg's main priority is helping St. Lucians create more support services for these children. He works with school principals, provides training for interested teachers in monthly workshops, and models lessons in the classroom. Halfway through his two-year Peace Corps assignment, Tom's also introduced an assessment tool to diagnose students' strengths and weaknesses and is currently working with teachers on using a new skill-building program in reading.

In one school last year where they were able to set up a resource room staffed by a teacher full-time, "We saw big improvements," says Mechtenberg. "The kids got more attention, and they wanted to be there for more than an hour a day." Unfortunately, not all the schools he works with could devote a full-time teacher to work with special-needs students, so the gains there have been harder to come by.

Tom's wife Mary, a former nurse, also volunteers for the Peace Corps, working in AIDS/HIV prevention. The couple lives in the lower level of a rented house in Soufriere that has a spectacular view of the Pitons (the twin peaks highlighted in all the tourist brochures) and get their exercise from the one-mile hike uphill to their home. Tom is also copy editor of a quarterly news magazine, *Serious Ting,* circulated among Peace Corps volunteers in the Caribbean.

"Overall, the experience has been gratifying," says Mechtenberg. "I'm happy that I've been able to use my experience in special education to start a new program here. I've also gained a new appreciation for the quality of life we enjoy in the United States. You have to take the long view, and the long view is that progress takes time."

You can reach Tom at mechtenbergs@hotmail.com.



Peace Corps volunteer Tom Mechtenberg (above), enjoys his down time. His flat has a view of the Piton twin peaks (at left).

SOBPRAP, THAILAND

FOR 33 YEARS, BARB GOSH TAUGHT at every level in Mundelein, Illinois, volunteering whenever a new class or course needed a teacher. Within six months of retiring, she was volunteering again, putting her Peace Corps application in the mail on the first day of the new millennium.

"As a teacher, you get a chance to see people—both students and parents—improve in some way and feel good about themselves," she says, explaining her decision. "I wasn't ready to retire from helping people make their lives better."

Within a year, this Midwesterner, who had never lived outside a cold climate or traveled to any other country besides Canada, was on her way to SobPrap, Thailand, where she recently completed her Peace Corps assignment.

"I was the only Westerner assigned to a town of 7,000 that was National Geographic beautiful," says Gosh. "You looked through the village, and over the rice paddies to rows of mountains." Gosh lived in a small house "about the size of a two-car garage—and it was one of the bigger ones in the village. I was delighted to have snakes in the house, because they took care of the mice."

Gosh's role in SobPrap was to identify several schools interested in modernizing their instruction, and then work with two or three teachers at each school. She coached the teachers on strategies to enhance students' problem-solving and introduced hands-on activities, which are rare in Thai schools. One of her favorite projects addressed the absence of globes and atlases in SobPrap schools. Gosh assisted teachers and students on a project that had students creating a mural of a world map on a school building wall.

While in Thailand, Gosh got help from her friends with the North Lakes Illinois Education Association-Retired chapter, who donated money to support the publication of an activity book and audiotape as well as scholarships to send students to high school. High school attendance in Thailand is not free, and, tragically, some poor children who cannot pay are sent by their parents to Bangkok to work as prostitutes. Gosh looks at the money in human terms, saying it was "something that will keep four kids in school and out of prostitution for two years."

Since returning, Gosh has lectured on her experience to groups of retired teachers, schools, and to her chapter of the American Association of University Women. "It was amazing—mentally, physically, culturally, and professionally challenging and satisfying," she says. "Yes, I'd volunteer again." nea

Barb Gosh established scholarships for Thai students with the help of her NEA-Retired local.

E-mail Barb at bgosh9876@aol.com.

RETIRING SOON? Be sure to check out joining the NEA-Retired program. Get information from your state affiliate, or go to **www.nea.org/retired.**

CATCH THE DREAM

Thousands of Americans have broadened their horizons teaching English overseas, but that's hardly your only option. Play your cards right, and you might find a group that will send you out to excavate archaeological sites, restore Buddhist temples, or help to catalog insect species in the rain forests of the Amazon basin.

If the idea of service overseas appeals to you, a great place to start is *How to Live Your Dream of Volunteering Overseas* (Penguin Publishing, 468 pp., $17) by Joseph Collins, Stefano DeZerega, and Zahara Heckscher. Among the book's tips:

CHECK YOUR MOTIVATION. Volunteering takes commitment, so if your primary motivation is to have an adventure, you might be better off with traditional travel options. Don't volunteer to escape a bad situation, or expect that your short-term assignment will change the world.

TALK WITH PROGRAM GRADS. If you're getting serious about volunteering overseas, interview several people who have been through the program that's piqued your interest. Their observations are likely to be more realistic than glossy brochures. The volunteer organization should be able to supply names.

HONE YOUR FUND-RAISING SKILLS. Many organizations that offer service opportunities require you to pay fees, which can add up to several thousand dollars depending upon the locale and length of assignment. You needn't shoulder the financial load yourself, though. Work with your business and social contacts, as well as community and religious groups, to offset the cost of service.

PHOTO (ST. LUCIA): VISUAL DOMAIN, LTD.

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WSNT0204

Lights! Camera! Learn!

A favorite storybook character, and a little star power, help North Carolina second graders reconnect with reading.

Second-grade teacher Brian Freeman was worried. In a year, his students would face North Carolina's state tests for reading comprehension and math—and Freeman wasn't sure they were ready. What could he do to motivate them to become voracious readers?

Freeman loved reading Jeff Brown's children's book *Flat Stanley* to his students. And the children seemed equally intrigued by the playful story, which chronicles the misadventures of a little boy, squashed flat by a falling bulletin board, as he travels around the country in an envelope. Drawing on the book's story line, Freeman created an engaging interdisciplinary project that boosted his students' reading performance and attracted statewide attention.

He knew his students in rural Robeson County were fascinated with their favorite celebrities. So Freeman had his students create their own Flat Stanley cut-outs and send them, along with personal letters, to "visit" their favorite sports and entertainment idols.

By the time Freeman's project got a full head of steam, more than two dozen celebrities had responded to the children's letters, including Michael Jordan, Jennifer Lopez, Muhammad Ali, Bill Gates, Jay Leno, and First Lady Laura Bush.

More important than any of the flash, however, was the substantive learning that occurred. During the course of the project, Freeman encouraged his students to read two books each night—and he wasn't above holding celebrity mail hostage until students reached their reading goals. The results were astounding.

At the end of the first nine weeks of school, each student had read an average of 42 books for the grading period. By the end of the year, kids were reading 136 books per grading period—reading more than 7,000 books the entire year.

"I saw the children reading without being told to," Freeman says. "Children asked to take books home on the weekend so they could read more."

Freeman's students improved their reading comprehension and fluency as well. For every book read, students completed a computerized comprehension test from the Accelerated Reader Program. At the beginning of the project only 57 percent of his students scored 80 or above on the tests. By the end of the year, more than 90 percent of his students had reached the passing rate.

Along the way, Freeman involved students in a dazzling variety of other disciplines too. The students practiced their math skills by calculating postage and the number of miles their Flat Stanley letters traveled. They used technology to research travel distances online and create digital graphs to chart celebrities' popularity among students. Freeman even partnered the activity with social studies lessons about the local community, tying into *Flat Stanley's* themes about the importance of home and family.

Freeman's creativity has not gone unnoticed. In December, he received the prestigious NEA Foundation Award for Teaching Excellence and a $25,000 prize. Before that, the North Carolina Association of Educators (NCAE) awarded Freeman the Terry Sanford Award for Creativity in Teaching and Administration. Meanwhile, Staff Development for Educators (a professional development company) named Freeman the 2002–03 National Second-Grade Teacher of the Year. That honor earned him a trip to the National Second-Grade Conference where he met the author of *Flat Stanley*, Jeff Brown. *USA Today* even named him one of the top 40 teachers in America.

But Freeman deflects the praise he's received from so many teaching honors by saying he's just doing his job, which is to make learning "fun, magical, and easy." It's working.

All of which goes to prove what educators have known for years: When you match a creative program with a brilliant teacher, the benefits to students can be spectacular.

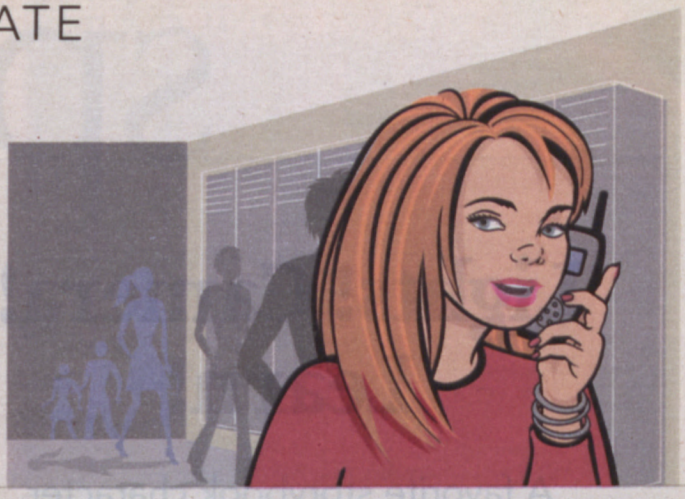
—DAVID MARTIN

For more creative project ideas using the book *Flat Stanley*, check out the Flat Stanley Project at www.flatstanleyproject.com.

Brian Freeman's *Flat Stanley* project energizes his students.

PHOTOS: TRACY WILCOX

Should we ban cell phones in school?



YES

Cell phones should absolutely be banned from school, no questions asked. My philosophy is that we lived a hundred years without them and we can live another hundred years without them if we chose to do so. They are nothing but a disruption to class instruction. The student (if he or she is waiting for a call) thinks about nothing but receiving that call, therefore blocking out anything that is being said, and it's simply not a necessity for being successful in school.

ERICH OSTROWSKI Fourth-grade teacher, Tucson, Arizona

Cell phones, like many other electronic devices, can be a distraction. Students need to learn when and where a cell phone can be appropriate. It is rude to the presenter when some person has a cell phone ringing during his or her presentation. Students are often easily distracted as it is, and a cell phone going off in a classroom can end the learning process as effectively as any fire drill. This is one of those life lessons we can teach them. Technology is a wonderful and useful tool when used properly. I can think of circumstances where a student needs to be on call during school. That is where the office and secretaries come in.

KRISTOPHER KAUFMAN Spanish teacher, Northern Tioga School District, Pennsylvania

Until this year cell phones were banned from school here in Maryland. This year, cell phones are allowed for safety reasons—in case of an emergency, students can call for help (e.g., Columbine). Well, our students have now figured out that they can cheat on quizzes and tests by "texting" each other. Not only are phones distracting but now they are a cheating tool.

KENNETH F. MEER Naval science instructor, Easton, Maryland

NO

Cell phones should be banned from classrooms but not from schools. When classes are in session, cell phones aren't.

When a student is maneuvering around after-school activities and pick-up times, cell phones are extremely handy.

The school should not be held accountable if the cell phone is stolen. As with any other possession, it's the student's responsibility. If the student is too young to keep track of a cell phone, the student is too young to have one.

MINDY SIDDELL student in teacher education, Seward, Nebraska

Cell phones are so ubiquitous that it's a losing battle, especially at the high school level. They are part of the younger generation's survival kit, just as Spalding high bounce balls were to those of us from the '50s. Here's the rule in my United States history classes: The cell phone needs to be on stun mode (vibration). If it rings during class, the student must surrender the phone and I get to answer it. Last year, I talked to two girlfriends, three boyfriends, and a mother. There were no repeat incidents.

RICHARD MOLLETTE High school history teacher, Seattle, Washington

I think cell phones are okay for students to have—just not out in the classroom. Schools are very dynamic today and many students use their cells to contact parents about activities they had forgotten about.

Also, in my first year of teaching, I came back from a cold Thanksgiving Friday tournament to find the school locked up. No one had a cell phone, but one of my colleagues made his students memorize his phone number. We called him and his nice warm van, and his cell phone saved the day.

BRIAN PRZYBYLSKI Elgin, Illinois

WHAT'S YOUR OPINION?

Should we ban cell phones in school?
To vote, visit our Web site at www.nea.org/neatoday and see the results instantly.

Should we install classroom surveillance cameras to reduce discipline problems?
The tally on the question in the last *NEA Today*:
37% Yes 63% No

Should we eliminate out-of-school suspension?
If you'd like to take part in this future Debate, send a brief note to Alain Jehlen, **ajehlen@nea.org.**

ILLUSTRATION: SHERYL CHAPMAN

Is Your Job Beyond Description?

Ohio ESPs develop job descriptions that clarify their roles—and contributions to public education.

Too often, individual education support professionals (ESPs) are given few details of the job duties expected of them. Many work without job descriptions, or with descriptions so vague or outdated that they are useless—leaving ESPs without guidance and vulnerable to discipline.

Last year, the 560-member Lakota School Support Association (LSSA) in southwestern Ohio began working in partnership with the Lakota School District to develop specific, workable job descriptions for every ESP in the district.

In undertaking this project, the NEA local affiliate chose to develop "results-oriented" job descriptions (ROJDs). The ROJD concept—developed by human resources experts Roger and Sandra Plachy and adapted by NEA for ESP members—moves one step beyond the listing of an employee's job tasks to a recognition of what he or she accomplishes towards the overall mission of a school.

"Accomplishment is very important to ESPs," says LSSA President Mark Chance, who performs maintenance work at 22 buildings throughout the district. "ESPs are the community. We go into our lines of work because we want to be school employees. Most of us would be doing something else if it weren't for the students we serve."

"Most of us ESPs would be doing something else if it weren't for the students we serve," says maintenance specialist **Mark Chance.**

Look at a typical ESP job description, and you'll find it's totally different from that of a teacher, Chase points out. "You might not know where we work. That's one reason why this effort has been so successful so far."

What's making a difference? The Lakota district is interviewing every ESP to develop meaningful job descriptions, "and part of that is acknowledging that we help education," notes the local president. "An electrician's job description may have said 'fixes wiring,' but now it will also say 'contributes to the safety of the school and its students by fixing wiring.'"

This local leader says the most critical part of the Lakota ROJD project is simply getting detailed job descriptions written.

"LSSA needs to represent its members as effectively as possible, and the old job descriptions were an obstacle," Chance notes. "Sometimes in my area, they were no more specific than saying 'maintenance employee.' So throughout the district, you'd have administrators calling plumbers for an electrical problem!"

Ohio Education Association Labor Relations Consultant Rodney Bird agrees that the new job descriptions will untangle lots of old problems.

"LSSA and the school district are not only confronting a situation in which existing job descriptions are inadequate, but one in which many jobs are changing dramatically," says Bird. "We've just finished work on new maintenance job descriptions, and now we're moving on to paraprofessionals and ESPs who work in special ed classrooms."

"These people are taking on changing duties, and more duties, every year," Bird adds. "They're excited that they'll finally have job descriptions that reflect their activities and support their contribution to the schools."

Chance says he and other maintenance employees "love" their new job write-ups. "The district is going to work better because of them," he stresses.

LSSA has worked with NEA's ESP Quality Department throughout this project. "Lakota is making terrific progress on behalf of support professionals," says NEA staffer Rafael Rivera. "Our national ROJD program is structured so that we can provide education and resources that enable an NEA local affiliate to take off on its own and work to tailor job descriptions to its own needs. LSSA has shown how effectively it can be done."

And none of it can happen without lots of labor-management cooperation.

"I have an intense belief in the power of the collaborative process," says Lakota district personnel director David Greenburg. "We as a district have learned a great deal from the ROJD process, which begins with the important stage of the employee stating everything he or she does on the job."

—MATT SIMON

For more: E-mail Rafael Rivera at rrivera@nea.org; phone: 202-822-7774.

More ESP news in this issue:

- **How states are pushing back on ESEA** — *Page 8*
- **Michigan ESP local bargains first NEA contract** — *Page 10*
- **Delaware ESPs win snow day arbitration case** — *Page 17*
- **Colorado local builds numbers, earns respect** — *Page 21*

PHOTO: MARK BEALER/BPA

How do you respond to **religious intolerance among students?**

Teach Diversity

Intolerance usually starts from ignorance. One way to fight this is to educate the children about the different customs some people have. When I taught early childhood special ed, I would do a unit in December about the customs and traditions of other people. We talked about Kwanzaa, Ramadan, Hanukkah and the different ways people in Sweden, Germany, England, and Mexico celebrated Christmas. We read stories, did crafts, researched them on the Internet and invited people in to talk to us about their customs. We also made snacks from each country or people we were studying. This was a great way to teach tolerance for others.

JULIE EVANS High School EBD, Springfield, Illinois

One Family

I'm an ESL teacher currently in southeast Asia who has a variety of mixed religions in the class. Simply state that this is "a classroom of study" and that religion does not apply. "We are one family unit working together." That's all it takes.

SHARON HAM AUA Language Center, Bangkok, Thailand

Whose Prayers?

Many years ago when I taught high school social studies in Los Angeles, I had a number of my students come into class after the first Bush won the presidency. They were excited about his pledge to return prayer to the classroom.

So I told them (tongue-in-cheek, of course) that we should practice praying if it was to become the law of the land. They excitedly asked if that was possible. I said to them, "Sure. We can close the door and no one would know." I then proceeded to say a prayer in Hebrew and asked them to repeat after me. Confused, they asked what that was about. I told them that if we were to pray in school we would do it my way, and I asked them what they had in mind?

Fortunately they got the point right away and we then had a discussion about diversity and religion in school and other government places.

IRA ERBS Ft. Vancouver High School, Vancouver, Washington

Respect—*Siempre*

Our student population comes from many different cultures. We have incorporated a program into the curriculum called ROPES: Respect Other People Equally *Siempre*. (*Siempre* is the Spanish word for "always.")

Our students are trained as peer teachers to present lessons on accepting differences in their classmates. Part of the program helps students practice appropriate responses—and respond to inappropriate responses. We are looking at this program as one way to educate our students and to help bring about an understanding and tolerance of cultural differences.

LINDA JAMES Guidance counselor, Framingham, Massachusetts

WE HAVE INCORPORATED a program into the curriculum called ROPES: Respect Other People Equally *Siempre*. (*Siempre* is the Spanish word for 'always.') Students are trained as peer teachers to present lessons on accepting differences in their classmates. —JAMES

Challenge the Stereotype

Years, ago, when a group of boys in my classroom were making derogatory remarks about another student's religion, I said to them, "You know, that football player you're always praising, [so-and-so], is that same race and religion. Would you say those things to him?"

By showing them that there are many different religions and creeds in our great melting pot world, we can help many children see the stupidity and cruelty in prejudice.

WEDA M. MOSELLIE Retired language arts/English teacher, Phillipsburg, New Jersey

GOT AN ANSWER?

When you work with a small group, how do you keep the rest of your class engaged?

E-mail your answer to **dilemma2@list.nea.org.** Or send by regular mail, or fax to 202-822-7206. Include your name, city, state, and job. If published, you will receive an *NEA Today* mug!

ILLUSTRATION: REGINA SCUDELLARI

Keys to Motivation

I have been assigned to teach a high school alternative special ed class of very unmotivated students. For most of my time, I teach at the elementary level but hold a K–12 certificate. Does anyone have any suggestions on what I might possibly do to get these kids motivated?
STEPHEN STROUSE *Music specialist, Barnegat, New Jersey*

ANSWER: The most important thing to do is to build a rapport with the students. This can be done by giving a few minutes a day to get to know the students. Keep activities as real and life-applicable as possible. Tie as many lessons into their world as you possibly can. A sense of humor is the only way to survive—don't be afraid to make a mistake or admit human frailty.
TERESA CALIGURI *Special education teacher, Fremont, Michigan*

ANSWER: Do not believe everything other people tell you about students! Assume they will be motivated. Create projects that ask them to find music that expresses what they are feeling and explain why, or ask them to create their own music. Many of my best students are those who are identified as special needs or are involved in the criminal justice system. These are not problem kids; they are students with problems. Value their differences and help them learn to work the way that is best for them. Be patient.
SHERI SHORTRIDGE *Art teacher, Center, Colorado*

"Before you look at that you should know I found an old report card of yours in the attic."

Scrubbers' Corner
What's the best stain remover out there?

In November we asked this question. You answered:

During the school year, I have the students donate several items for classroom use. Items that are particularly handy are boxes of baby wipes. These are excellent for wiping hands after recess and before lunch, cleaning up desk tops, wiping dry erase boards, and even cleaning small spills on the carpet. You'll be surprised at all the helpful, quick uses these wipes will provide.
KATHY MORRIS *Third grade teacher, Vacaville, California*

The best stain remover came from my mother. It is equal parts of dish detergent, ammonia, and water. I put it in a squeeze bottle and use it for laundry, carpet stains, and much more.
RHONDA LEWIS *Lunch Assistant, Pattengill Middle School, Lansing, Michigan*

Effective Silent Reading

My junior high is returning to a daily silent sustained reading period. We have used it before with variable success. Does anyone have any successful ideas to share on using reading periods at this level?
KAREN GODFREY English and French teacher, Topeka, Kansas

ANSWER: I taught at a middle school with very low-level readers. We had a 20-minute sustained silent reading period every day. It was a struggle to take hold with both teachers and students. So, I decided to issue a challenge to my students. They thrived on challenges, especially when I was a participant, and I allowed them to set the 'stakes' of this challenge. I challenged them both collectively and individually to read a certain number of books per quarter, adjusted according to their levels. They challenged me to read their favorite books, many of which I had never read. Each student listed his or her favorite book, and I was to read at least five a quarter (in a 20 student class). There were rewards or consequences for achieving or not achieving the assigned goals.
KATIE SNOW *Social studies teacher, Chattanooga, Tennessee*

Seeking Sci-Fi

I teach 6th grade science in a middle school and I am looking for a good science fiction novel to read with my students. I especially would be interested in anything dealing with the environment. Any suggestions?
CHERYL BUTLER *Colorado*

Share your wisdom, ask your question!

What's the best cheap weekend getaway for de-stressing?

Send your answers to these or other questions on this page to **ajehlen@nea.org.** Or, send us a question you'd like to see posted. Please include your name, your job, and the community and state where you work.

For a weekly email of questions, answers, and practical classroom tips, join Works4Me, one of the NEA's most popular and useful services. Just send the message "subscribe Works4Me" (without the quotation marks) to **Lyris@list.nea.org.**

ILLUSTRATION TOP: JANNINE CABOSSEL; ILLUSTRATION BOTTOM: STEPHEN FOSTER; PHOTO: PHOTODISC

Beat the Motivation Blues!

Bravo, you're on board! Keep checking in at www.neafitness.org

BY SHEREE CRUTE

If you're among the hundreds of educators taking the NEA Fitness Challenge and your zeal is starting to fade, take heart: There *is* a way to stay psyched and keep those pounds rolling off. How? Just ask your colleagues (and a few experts, too!)

A pound shed is a triumph shared for the F-D-S Challenge team at West Center Area Secondary School in Barrett, Minnesota. The team—officially, Five Dedicated Scholars—joined the NEA Fitness Challenge nine weeks ago with this goal of shared success in mind, and their strategy has been working like a charm—not only in keeping the weight rolling off, but keeping members pumped to stay the course.

The plan the members hatched, says Tim Cochran, the team reporter, calls for everybody to lose one pound a week. Each member then donates his pound to the team weight loss pool. If one member has a bad week, other members compensate by donating extra pounds of their own. It's a win-win situation, Cochran explains, because as long as somebody drops a pound, there's no such thing as failure. Everyone has contributed to the group's success, even as they motivate the members who aren't losing. And the plan is working: After 10 weeks the F-D-S team had whittled away 55 whopping pounds.

Diet and exercise, of course, went a long way toward contributing to their success. But just as important was the team's ability to figure out how to build and maintain motivation. It's a critical skill, because it's tied to changing habits for the long haul, explains David Katz, M.D., a Yale School of Medicine professor and author of *The Way To Eat* (Sourcebooks, 2002). But making long-term fixes like not snacking through the day or choosing the couch over the hiking trail, is not exactly in our nature, he says.

"We evolved from metabolically efficient ancestors who had no biological defenses against nutritional excess," Katz explains. Translation: They never had enough to eat, so they were genetically programmed to eat as much as possible when food was available.

Their bodies also stored as much fat as possible to keep them alive. As for their workouts—well, if you had to slay a wild animal and forage through miles of forest to put dinner on the table, you'd be in great shape, too. We're all just hungry cave folk living in an age of fast food and super-sized portions.

But hold on before you dive headfirst into a Big Mac. There's definitely hope because—news flash!—you are not a slave to your DNA. Your highly evolved mind is a superb defense against obesity and the ravages of a sedentary lifestyle.

To show you how to use it, we've asked Katz, along with Natalie Newton, Ph.D, a sports psychologist, and Lambert Deckers, Ph.D, a professor at Ball State University and author of *Motivation: Biological, Psychological and Environmental* (Allyn & Bacon, 2001), to help you find the staying power to stick with your healthy living plan for the years to come.

Clip out these tips and post them on the fridge to fortify you on those days when you think you just can't eat another low-fat meal or walk another mile.

PHOTO COURTESY OF THE F-D-S TEAM

The Challenge Motivation Credo

1. BALANCE LOWS WITH HIGHS. Use high motivation days to build a structure to protect you when your inspiration is low, David Katz, M.D., says. Pick a brace for your sore knee now, for example, so you can't use not having one as an excuse to lounge later on. The day you celebrate losing your first five—or 10—pounds, clean the cookies out of the pantry and put only healthy foods on your permanent grocery list before the temptation to call it quits sets in.

2. CONSIDER THE KIDS. "We are on a trajectory where we will soon see cardiovascular disease in 18-year-olds," Katz says. Our children are obese and they need the help of every parent, educator, and any other adult who's willing. You can and should serve as fit and healthy role models. Obesity can do as much or more damage than drugs, alcohol, or tobacco.

3. CONFRONT YOUR SABOTEURS. In a world where 80 percent of adults are overweight, Katz says, a person losing weight is going to threaten someone. When you hear jabs like: "Why lose, you'll just gain it back," or "You've lost weight. Gee, you look sick," and so on, say: "I could really use your help to stay on my plan so please support me or join me, but don't criticize."

4. COUNT YOUR BLESSINGS—AND YOUR STEPS. Hate walking? Reframe that thought. With each step, Katz says, focus on how wonderful it is to be strong enough to feel every muscle (even if they're sore) that day. Be joyous about your vitality and growing strength. It's a gift.

5. FOCUS ON YOUR FABULOUS FUTURE. Really home in on your long-term goals, Lambert Deckers says. Envision yourself as the proverbial little old lady (or gentleman) in tennis shoes, full of energy, clear-headed, chasing your grandchildren, in love with life. Write out a timeline, how many pounds until your hypertension or diabetes risk disappears? Think about how successfully exercise strengthens the mind. You can make it happen.

6. ACCEPT THAT YOU ARE MASTER OF YOUR UNIVERSE. Sure, your sixth period class challenged every ounce of your patience, but ultimately, you're responsible for those Twinkies you're about to eat. "You have to believe you are the master of your fate," Deckers says. When you do, little can sway you from your path.

7. SEARCH YOUR SOUL. Intrinsic, inner motivators stay with you, sports psychologist Natalie Newton says. External motivators fade. Really think about your most meaningful reasons for wanting to be healthy, and write them down so you can look them over from time to time. Concentrate on building strong self-esteem and nurturing your self-image.

8. PLAN AHEAD. This may seem simple or even optional, Newton says, but in fact, it's crucial to your success. Restructure your life so that healthy eating and time for exercise are permanent parts of your day, *not* special events.

9. BEAT FOOD COMPANIES AT THEIR OWN GAME. Processed foods really are designed to make you eat more. Using a concept call sensory-specific-satiety, Katz explains, companies trigger your appetite with complex flavors. That's why most cold cereals have almost as much salt as potato chips and a ton of sugar; you will eat them until you satisfy your sweet tooth, then continue eating until you fulfill your desire for a salty snack, even though you're already full. Major culprits are spaghetti sauce, bread, salad dressings, and snack foods. To avoid the trap: Scan labels for added salts and sugars. Eat whole foods, with few if any additives.

10. HAVE FUN. This is not the *work* of dieting and exercising; it's the *thrill* of living your life to the fullest. Eating well, moving your body, and enhancing your health can be a ball. Looking great and feeling great are part of the package. So, learn to samba, cross-country ski, take a low-fat gourmet-cooking course with your spouse. Plan the shopping excursion you want to take after you drop those 20, 30, or even 50 pounds. Celebrate being healthy and enjoying life every day!

More Health and Fitness tips on next page

Left, from left: **Terry Ohlgren, Rich Duncan, Tim Cochran, Mike Frisch,** and **Pat Anderson.**

Log On and Slim Down Faster

Support and great advice are the backbone of every successful health and fitness plan, so log on to www.neafitness.org to get the latest news on how to get the most out of your diet and exercise plan and beat stress. Also, check in to participate in live chats with the NEA Challenge Dream Team and find out about team progress around the country. There's even a chat room where you can share your story with Challenge members nationwide. Think of the Challenge Web site as *your* very own personal trainer.

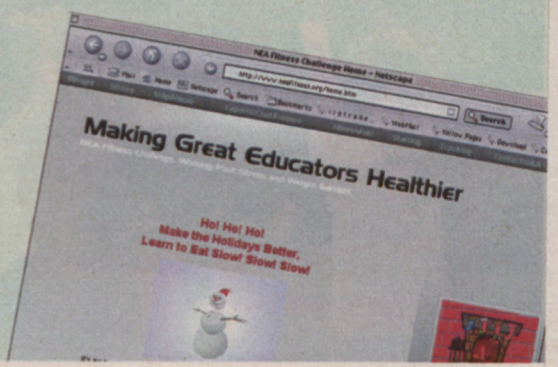


ILLUSTRATION: PHOTODISC

The Nutrition Challenge, Part Three

Winning At Long-Term Weight Loss

Congratulations! By now you've been following the Challenge nutrition plan for about five months, and you're starting to see those pounds melt away. "At this point, you've probably lost between 10–20 pounds," says Molly Gee, Challenge nutrition expert. Cheers if you've accomplished even more. But even if you've only trimmed a pound or two, don't despair. Everyone loses weight at a different rate.

Or, perhaps you're really trying your best, but you're stuck at the same weight. Relax. "It's perfectly normal for weight loss to slow down, or stop altogether at some point in your plan. Just don't give up." Gee says. The pounds will start to drop off again soon. Here are her suggestions for moving forward.

1. REMEMBER THE BENEFITS. With every pound lost, you are guaranteed to look and feel better, have more energy, greater confidence, and improved health.

2. RE-EXAMINE YOUR GOALS. Maybe you've reached a healthy, realistic weight range for you. Do you feel good at this weight and is it the best for your health over the long term? If yes, then the real work will begin. Maintaining a healthy weight is a journey and not a destination.

It's time to make your healthy eating and physical activity plan a lifelong habit, not a short-term test.

3. BE REALISTIC. If you still want to lose weight, don't chase a "dream" weight that may not be easy to attain or the best for your health's sake. If you're determined to keep going, however, keep in mind that the pounds come off fastest in the first six months. After that things will slow down a bit.

4. REVIEW AND REVISE. Take a look at your food diary and see how you're doing with your eating plan. Are you

letting larger portions squeak by? Are you still measuring and weighing your foods? If you're having a tough time working with prepared meals, consider using meal replacements (a Slim Fast shake or bar, for example) for breakfast and/or lunch. Do not skip breakfast. Boredom is another common factor. Introduce new foods and try new recipes, or maybe treat yourself to a new low-fat cookbook.

Different Goals, Same Team

A big part of sticking with a healthy living plan is tailoring it to your needs. The Levy Woodchucks, the Challenge team from the Levy Special Education Center in Wichita, Kansas, are doing just that. All six team members have their personal goals, but are working in tandem with their team members to meet them.

Linda Baty is heeding her doctor's warning and losing weight to beat her elevated diabetes risk. Maria Brown and Debbie Burgardt are working hard to get in better physical condition, and if a few pounds happen to drop off, that'll be great too. Connie Foster wants support working out as she tries out the Atkins diet. Rebecca Gobel is a devoted fan of The Firm workout plan, but wants the extra boost to help her tone and slim down. Kathy Murguia is supplementing her Challenge workouts with a program called T.O.P.S. (Taking Off Pounds Sensibly). Together the women work out and give each other the emotional help needed to meet their individual goals. Their secret: "We never leave the building before we work out," Rebecca says. "We go straight to the library after school with our favorite workout tapes and hold a class."

From left: **Connie Foster, Linda Baty, Kathy Murguia, Rebecca Gobel, Debbie Burgardt,** and **Maria Brown**

PHOTO: COURTESY OF CONNIE FOSTER; ILLUSTRATION: FIONA HAWTHORNE

The Walking Challenge, Part Three

Beat the Plateau Blues

You're now five months into your Challenge fitness plan and you should be starting to see great results, says C. B. Yelverton, Challenge fitness advisor. If, however, you've just signed up, click on www.neafitness.org and follow the first steps. If you've been on the program and are happy with your results, stick with the last workout and stay the course. You should feel strong and energized during your workouts, a little slimmer and trimmer.

On the other hand, you may also be ready for a little excitement or experiencing the bane of every fitness plan—the weight loss plateau. "If you're feeling the need for something new or finding that the pounds just aren't coming off quick enough," Yelverton says, it's time to give your body a jolt. Your first weapon is the element of surprise.

"Muscles adapt very quickly to exercise, so when your body does the same workout repeatedly at the same level it begins to work more efficiently," Yelverton explains. This is one of the few situations, however, where efficiency is not exactly good news, because it means you're burning fewer calories, even though you're still in good shape. Here are some tips for shaking things up and kicking your body into even higher gear.

Mix It Up

> If you normally do a 45-minute walk on the same route or treadmill program, do 30 minutes on uneven terrain (or a random treadmill program).

> Bike 45 minutes, then power walk holding a 1-2 pound weight, or add a few 60-second sprints to your walk.

> Use the rowing machine for 20 minutes, bike 20, and walk/run for 20. The hour will seem to go by fast.

Spread Your Wings

> Do something enjoyable—dance, roller skate, or try roller blades.

> Add weight training, stair climb, hike an interesting trail, row on a lake.

> Run, walk, or bike for a cause such as the cure for AIDS. Most of these fund-raising events start in the spring and continue through the summer and fall.

> *Butt* and *abs* videos are great to follow. Buy at least three to keep you motivated and muscles constantly surprised.

For the more advanced:

> Sign up for a road race (bike, run, or biathlon) once a month and train for it!

> Join an athletic team—volleyball, tennis, softball.

> Plan a rock climbing, canoeing, or whitewater rafting trip with friends and colleagues

Keep on track

> Continue to measure your waist, lower abs, hips, and thighs. At this level, measuring with the tape is more important than getting on the scale because you may lose inches, even if you have not lost weight. Think of it as fine-tuning your body. It gives you a more accurate assessment of your body composition. nea

Sibling Rivalry

Dorothy Bumpus-Page and Dorothea Bumpus-Bradley have been doing just about everything together since they were little girls.

Identical twins who still dress alike (they're 35), they teach in adjoining classrooms at Boone Elementary School in the Center School District, Kansas City, Missouri. Now they've started a Challenge team and are going strong. "We started out just to improve our health," Dorothy says, "but losing weight along the way is great." By eating salads for lunch, drinking lots of water, staying away from greasy fast food, and working out a few times a week, Dorothy has lost seven pounds and Dorothea's down 10. And, they've inspired others; fellow teachers Rebecca Johnson and Connie Jones recently joined their team.

From left: **Dorothy Bumpus-Page, Rebecca Johnson,** and **Dorothea Bumpus-Bradley.**

PHOTO: COURTESY OF DOROTHY BUMPUS-PAGE; ILLUSTRATION: MERCEDES MCDONALD

Honky Tonk Girl

Listen to the uplifting harmonies and foot-stomping beats of Karen Collins' music, and you'll know that not all cowgirls get the blues.

COLLINS, A COMPUTER PROGRAMMING INSTRUCTOR at Blair High School in Montgomery County, Maryland, sings and plays fiddle for two country music bands that perform in the Washington, D.C., area.

Collins grew up a reluctant listener of her parents' country music. "I always played some kind of instrument as a kid, but I never liked country music back then," she confesses. "I guess it must have sunk in!"

The southwest Virginia native discovered the thrill of singing and fiddle playing 10 years ago when she and five fellow musicians formed Squeeze Bayou, an award-winning Cajun music band influenced by the traditional two-step dances of southwestern Louisiana.

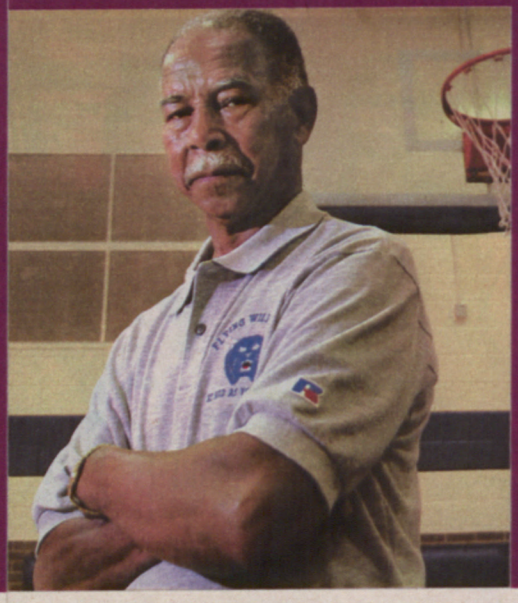
After an impromptu night of singing with two friends, Collins decided to start a group of her own. Now, five years later, the three-woman Blue Moon Cowgirls boasts a repertoire rooted in early country and traditional bluegrass music.

Collins cites arranging rehearsal time into her schedule as the hardest part of her musical endeavors.

"The bands are a big time commitment," she acknowledges, "but they're also a lot of fun. There's nothing like getting the three-part harmonies really tight, and seeing people's reactions to our music, dancing and singing along in the audience."

—TAMARA ZAKIM

Lifetime Winning Streak



Almost 50 years ago, Robert Hughes' college basketball coach at Texas Southern University told him that he "had it in him to coach."

AT THE TIME HUGHES BLEW HIM OFF, saying he would only accept a coaching position if he could call the shots. A few days later, the coach called back with three offers—each as a head coach. Hughes accepted one and never looked back. Now, 45 years and 1,282 basketball coaching victories later, he hasn't regretted his decision once.

Hughes, a health teacher at Dunbar High School in Fort Worth, Texas, holds the national record for most basketball coaching victories. His teams have won 32 district titles and he has earned spots in two high school halls of fame.

But, the accolades aren't what motivates Hughes, his students do—both on and off the court. "You have to love what you do, and I keep telling my students they should try and be the best at whatever they attempt," he says.

As the son of a teacher, Hughes developed a passion for teaching and learning new things at an early age. That drive pushes him to find innovative ways of teaching, both in the classroom and on the court, and he doesn't plan to stop anytime soon.

"I am going to keep doing what I do as long as I can," Hughes says.

—URMILA SUBRAMANYAM

PHOTOS TOP: CHARLES VOTAW; BOTTOM: NAN COULTER

Teaching's Golden Years

"First grade is my first love," says Lucille Decker, reminiscing about her 59-year tenure as an elementary school teacher at Elgin and Princeton South Elementary Schools in Minnesota.

FOR DECKER, TEACHING students to read is not just a profession; it's her life.

So last June, when she met with a school counselor to discuss her retirement options, she decided there was no way she could quit. And, instead, she went home to prepare her lesson plans for her 60th year of teaching, this time as director of a tutorial program that pairs Decker with students for one-on-one reading reinforcement.

"They get a sparkle in their eyes when they 'get it' and that's a big reward," Decker says of her students, who are just learning to read. "And I have always been enthusiastic about teaching."

In a time when teacher "burn out" is frequent, Decker presses on with the reading methods she's employed and restructured for years to help generations of students become good readers and productive citizens. Decker says she continues to teach because of her strong commitment to the community.

"It's my passion and I still have a lot of energy," says Decker who, in good health, has no immediate plans for retiring.

—TIFFANY MITCHELL

Painful Experiences, Powerful Lessons

When retired California member Amy Tsubokawa was nine, her family—like thousands of Japanese-American families—was sent to an internment camp for the duration of World War II.

WHILE CONFINED TO A BARRACKS in Poston, Arizona, where temperatures reached 116 degrees in the summer, Tsubokawa watched her father weaken and eventually die of a kidney ailment.

"It was a difficult and sorrowful time for us," says Tsubokawa. "But my family was luckier than most. We were farmers, and when we were released, we were able to live and work on my uncle's farm. He was an American citizen, so he was able to own his land.

"Most Japanese-Americans at that time were not citizens, could not own land, and found after the war that their farms had been taken over by corporations."

Each year, Tsubokawa speaks on the Japanese-American war experience before the California Teachers Association Human Rights Conference. Her tireless work as a trainer in women's leadership, cultural diversity, and minority leadership development earned her the 2001 NEA Mary Hatwood Futrell Award for women's leadership.

"It's something I'm proud and grateful to be able to do," says Tsubokawa, who taught elementary school for 30 years in California's Norwalk-La Mirada School District. "I experienced injustice, but life is long, and I've also experienced the opportunity to attend college and enjoy the rewards of teaching. So I want to be able to turn my experience into positive lessons. When Japanese-Americans say, 'This happened to us,' we're helping to make sure it doesn't happen to someone else in the future."

—MATT SIMON

GOT A TIP?

Do you have an interesting story idea? Contact Kristen Loschert, section editor, at **kloschert@nea.org.**

PHOTO TOP: JANET HOSTETTER; BOTTOM: BOB RIHA JR.

resources

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59 **OWL.org** Dishing up ways to participate in NEA's Read Across America.
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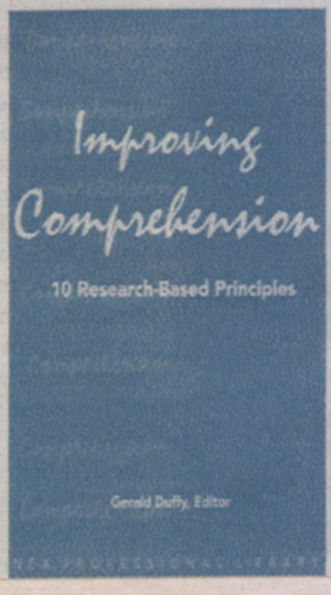
62 **NEA's Read Across America** It's almost March 2—are you ready?

Improving Comprehension: Ten Research-Based Principles

NEA Success in Reading Series
Gerald Duffy, Editor
72 pp. $10.95 NEA Members, $12.95 nonmembers
NEA Professional Library, www/nea.org/books

[BOOK EXCERPT]



TEXT IS MORE THAN BOOKS

We tend to think of text as books. While classrooms should have many books, there should also be many other forms of text at all grade levels. There should be lots of student-produced texts, instructional charts, posters, magazines, and computers, to name just a few examples.

Because reading is used in all subject matter, it cuts across the school day and includes many different kinds of texts. Consequently, comprehension must be taught at all grades and in all school subjects. It cannot be confined to "reading/language arts time."

Although we sometimes think of reading as a general skill, different texts require different kinds of reading. Reading fairy tales, for instance, calls for different strategies than reading a set of instructions, a historical treatise, a math word problem, or a recipe. *How* we read depends on *what* we read. Thus, children need to learn to comprehend different kinds of text in many different situations.

DIFFERENT KINDS OF TEXT

Three major kinds of text that children learn to comprehend are narrative text, expository text, and procedural text.

Students frequently encounter stories in primary grade reading materials such as basal textbooks. Besides stories, students may encounter such narrative text forms as drama, fairy tales, folk literature, biographies, epic poems, fables, historical fiction, and mythology. Each form of narrative has a distinguishing structure, and each structure requires a slightly different approach to comprehension. The more experience a reader has with various narrative structures, the more he or she is able to use that experience to anticipate meaning.

There are also many different kinds of expository text. Readers may encounter historical texts, news articles, scientific articles, journal entries, and Internet text. As with narratives, the more students know about various kinds of expository text, the better they will comprehend, because they use prior knowledge about a text's structure to help them construct meaning.

Being able to comprehend procedural text—such as recipes, sets of directions, and math word problems—is increasingly critical to functioning in the world outside the classroom.

Different strategies are needed for different texts. Summarizing an expository text, where the focus is usually on the main ideas, requires

Book Excerpt *continued*

different strategies than summarizing a story, where the focus is usually on the characters, setting, problem, and related events. Moreover, summarizing is usually an appropriate strategy for a narrative, for example, but not for complex directions.

Because a reader's comprehension strategies change depending on the text being used and the situation in which it is being used, we can expect comprehension instruction to vary from one subject to another.

To order, contact the NEA Professional Library at 800-229-4200, or go to www.nea.org/books.

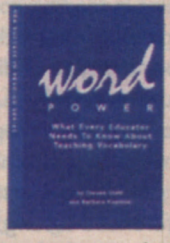
Help with Reading

FROM "SAVING THE JOY" ON PAGE 24

NEA RESOURCES

WORD POWER: WHAT EVERY EDUCATOR NEEDS TO KNOW ABOUT TEACHING VOCABULARY

By Steven Stahl and Barbara Kapinus



NEA SUCCESS IN READING SERIES

A good vocabulary is critical for success in reading, and every content area has vocabulary to master. Whether you're teaching a third-grade math lesson or high school science, *Word Power* offers K–12 classroom teachers proven techniques for effective vocabulary instruction. Learn how to provide multiple exposures to meaningful information about a word, and employ both definitional and contextual information about word meanings. This book gives teachers the tools they need to turn students into "wordophiles."
NEA Professional Library

MEETING THE CHALLENGE: SPECIAL EDUCATION TOOLS THAT WORK FOR ALL KIDS

By Patti Ralabate

Effective teachers need effective strategies to use with students struggling to overcome academic or behavioral difficulties. *Meeting the Challenge* gives you the tools you need to teach a classroom full of students with various skill levels and special needs. This tool kit provides specialized resources and time-saving strategies, as well as sample checklists, IEP goals, lesson plans, rubrics, and more. You'll find planning sheets and other resources you can copy and use or modify to your own special needs.
NEA Professional Library

BOOKS YOUR KIDS WILL TALK ABOUT! A GUIDE TO CHILDREN'S LITERATURE FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS (K–6)

By Susan Hepler and Maria Salvadore

Kids enjoy talking about their favorite books, and encouraging kids to talk about what they've read is a powerful learning tool that can motivate and inspire. *Books Your Kids Will Talk About!* helps educators and parents navigate the ever-expanding universe of children's literature. This comprehensive, multicultural, annotated booklist is organized around themes germane to a child's world. Teachers will find suggestions on how to integrate these books into their curriculum. Parents can use the books as a suggested reading list to foster lively discussion and self-exploration among young readers.
NEA Professional Library

THE EFFECTIVE READING SERIES

This helpful series includes seven free pamphlets based on scientific research. For an effective reading program, check out the following titles: Characteristics of Teachers Who Are Effective in Teaching All Children to Read; Characteristics of Schools That Are Effective in Teaching All Children to Read; Beginning Reading Instruction: The Rest of the Story from Research; Ten Research-Based Principles of Comprehension Instruction; Advice on Reading from Experts; Steps for School-Wide Reading Improvement; and Research-Supported Characteristics of Teachers and Schools That Promote Reading Achievement.
NEA Student Achievement

OTHER RESOURCES

PROMISING PRACTICES FOR URBAN READING INSTRUCTION

Pamela A. Mason and Jeanne Shay Schumm, Editors

As the reading profession faces the challenge of high-stakes testing and standards-based curricula, it's essential that educators who plan and implement reading programs in urban settings have a professional development resource that speaks directly to urban education and diversity. This collection of articles is based on an International Reading Association position statement outlining what children need to become competent readers and writers.
International Reading Association, Inc.

READING TO LEARN: LESSONS FROM EXEMPLARY FOURTH-GRADE CLASSROOMS

By Richard L. Allington and Peter H. Johnston

Fourth graders around the country face new, high-stakes standardized tests, drawing increased attention to the need for effective literacy instruction in the upper-elementary grades. This book offers a classroom view of the techniques and strategies highly successful teachers use to engage students, help them develop as thoughtful readers and writers, and bolster self-directed learning and literate conversation.
Guilford Press

SUBJECTS MATTER: EVERY TEACHER'S GUIDE TO CONTENT-AREA READING

By Harvey Daniels and Steven Zemelman

Finally, a book about content-area reading that's just as useful to math, science, and history teachers as it is to English teachers. Lively, and practical, *Subjects Matter* points the way to activities and materials that energize content and engage students across all subject

Resources *continues on next page*

Need **investments**?

Need to **protect** your family?

Need a **retirement** plan?

Need a **personal loan** or **credit**?

Need a **money** market account?

Need a **mortgage**?

Need a **little help?**

Here at NEA Member Benefits we are dedicated to helping members get a handle on their most important financial responsibilities by offering superior products and outstanding service. The buying power of 2.7 million NEA members is what makes it possible to negotiate excellent group rates and special deals on programs and services tailored to your needs. To find out about programs suitable for you and your family, call 1-800-637-4636. Visit us anytime at www.neamb.com.

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Monday-Friday, 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. (or Saturday, 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.) ET
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CONT0204

areas. The book includes: 23 classroom activities that help students understand and remember what they read in mathematics, science, English, and more; an analysis of today's textbooks, along with specific ways to use them more effectively; and a new "balanced diet" of reading, including 150 real books of interest to teenage readers. *Subjects Matter* shows how young people can read and succeed across the curriculum, and how their teachers can help. *Heinemann*

DIFFERENTIATING INSTRUCTION FOR STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES: BEST TEACHING PRACTICES FOR GENERAL AND SPECIAL EDUCATORS

By William N. Bender

Whether your challenging students are identified as learning disabled or low-achieving, the strategies and tactics in this book can lead to significant gains in reading comprehension, language arts, and math. This book describes the type of differentiation in instruction certain students require and shows, step-by-step, how to implement the best teaching methods, reading and literacy instruction, criterion-referenced testing, peer-assisted learning strategies, and more. *Corwin Press and the Council for Exceptional Children*

AFTER EARLY INTERVENTION, THEN WHAT? TEACHING STRUGGLING READERS IN GRADE 3 AND BEYOND

Rachel McCormack and Jeanne Paratore, Editors

Even with effective early intervention, many students continue to need expert, intensive, and focused reading instruction well beyond the primary-grade years. This resource helps intermediate and middle school educators develop instructional strategies for these struggling students. The chapters address the needs of children in a range of instructional settings such as general, special, and bilingual classrooms and learning contexts such as classroom, small group, individual, and tutorial. *International Reading Association, Inc.*

Grants, Awards, and Competitions

IT'S NEVER TOO LATE TO APPLY FOR GRANTS FROM THE NEA FOUNDATION

Do you have an innovative idea that will improve student achievement, but lack the funds to implement the project? The NEA Foundation's *Innovation Grants* can help.

Do you want to undertake professional development that will benefit your students and your colleagues? Look to the Foundation *Learning & Leadership Grants*.

Did you miss the early February application dates? Don't worry. The NEA Foundation accepts applications for these grants on an **ongoing, year-round basis,** so it's never too late to apply for a grant of your own. NEA members just like you have applied for and received hundreds of grants throughout the years. Read about their projects at www.nfie.org, then submit your own idea.

THE NEA FOUNDATION FOR THE IMPROVEMENT of EDUCATION
www.nfie.org

Innovation Grants and *Learning & Leadership Grants* are available for all subjects, including the arts, literacy, science, and technology. Additional funding for arts education is available through *Fine Arts Grants* and *Arts@Work Grants*.

All members who are practicing U.S. public school teachers in grades K–12, education support professionals, or higher education faculty and staff at public colleges and universities are encouraged to apply. We now offer **bigger and better grants—up to $5,000** per project—to fund your BIG ideas.

Applying for a grant is easy, so why wait? Visit www.nfie.org today for more information on all of our grant programs, including guidelines and an application, or call 202-822-7840.

ORPHAN FOUNDATION SCHOLARSHIPS

The Orphan Foundation of America offers approximately 350 scholarships a year, ranging from $1,500 to $6,000, to students attending college. To be eligible, a student must have aged out of the foster care system having spent at least the one year prior to their 18th birthday in care. They also must be accepted into or enrolled in college or a vocational training program. The scholarship is renewable through the Bachelor's degree, but must be reapplied for every year. Applications are due April 1, 2004. Application forms are available at www.orphan.org.

TEACHER TRAINING GRANTS

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) offers grants to teams of educators looking to help students link local history inquiry with community service learning projects. The teacher training grants are part of "CiviConnections: Constructing the past, creating the future," a project funded by a grant from the federal Corporation for National and Community Service. CiviConnections will involve more than 297 teachers and 7,425 students nationwide in grades 3–12. A team of three teachers can apply for a $7,500 grant to cover their costs for attending a summer workshop, implementing the program during the fall of 2004, and attending the 2004 NCSS Annual Conference in Baltimore.

CiviConnections will engage selected teachers and their students in these activities: 1) students and teachers choose a current issue of concern or need in the local community; 2) students investigate the issue through their community's history; 3) students compare their local findings with learning about the selected issue in our nation's history; 4) students look at how the issue is impacted by one or more government documents, such as the Bill of Rights; 5) students design and conduct quality service learning activities to work on the issue and strengthen their community; and 6) students create a public display to educate the community and celebrate their collaborative service projects.

Teachers will develop and adapt these activities based on their students' interests and abilities, the needs or problems in the local community, and their local social studies curriculum requirements.

Interested educators must:

- apply in a team of three teachers from grades 3–12 in the same school district
- be members of the National Council for the Social Studies (or agree to join if your application is accepted)
- partner with at least one local community agency
- involve at least 25 students per teacher in at least 20 hours of service each (this may include community interviews, advocacy activities in the classroom, service with individuals in the community, and creation of the public display)
- attend one three-day summer 2004 workshop and the 2004 NCSS Annual Conference in Baltimore (all funding for the workshop and conference is to be paid from the $7,500 grant)
- implement the program during the fall of 2004
- comply with grant evaluation and reporting procedures.

For more information about CiviConnections or the application process, contact civiconnections@ncss.org. Applications are due April 30, 2004.

MIDDLE SCHOOL AWARDS FOR POSITIVE CHANGE

The Christopher Columbus Awards challenge middle school students to explore opportunities for positive change in their communities. Teams of up to four students and a coach identify a community issue and use the scientific process to solve it. Finalist teams win an all-expense-paid trip to Walt Disney World where they compete for U.S. Savings Bonds and the $25,000 Columbus Foundation Community Grant to help bring their idea to life in their community. Past winners have included a group of Native American girls who built a study hall out of straw on the Crow Indian Reservation in Montana, and a group of students from New Jersey who developed a technology to help deaf athletes communicate with their coaches while on the playing field.

For more information and competition guidelines, call 800-291-6020 or visit www.christophercolumbusawards.com. Coaches may be teachers, parents, community leaders, or mentors. Teams do not need to be affiliated with a school to enter. The deadline for receipt of entries is February 17, 2004.

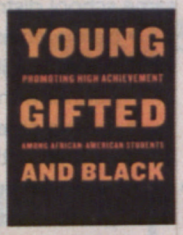
The Christopher Columbus Awards program is sponsored by the Christopher Columbus Fellowship Foundation with support from the National Science Foundation. It is endorsed by the National Middle School Association.

In Print

SERVING PROUDLY

African-Americans have played a large role in many American conflicts from as early as the Revolutionary War all the way up to today. *American Patriots: The Story of Blacks in the Military from the Revolution to Desert Storm* discusses how African-Americans have fought for freedom in foreign lands, even when they did not have that same freedom at home. This edition has been adapted for young readers by Tonya Bolden from author Gail Buckley's award-winning book of the same name. 240 pp. $15.95 from Random House. To order, go to www.randomhouse.com or call 800-733-3000.

YOUNG, GIFTED, AND BLACK



Young, Gifted, and Black comprises three unique essays by college professors Theresa Perry, Claude Steele, and Asa Hillard. Their writings dissect the performance of Black students, examine the stigmas attached with achievement in the classroom, and provide new and compelling information on the ongoing debate between the disparity that exists between white and African-American students. 192 pp. $16 from Beacon Press. To order, visit www.amazon.com.

THE QUILT THAT CLARA BUILT

Sweet Clara and the Freedom Quilt, by Deborah Hopkinson with paintings by James Ransome, is a coming-of-age story of a young slave girl separated from her parents and sent away to live on a plantation. Clara learns to sew and decides to make a map that is actually a carefully crafted quilt that shows neighboring lakes, plantations, and roads. The quilt helps her find the mother she was separated from and find her way to freedom in Canada. The quilt helps others to freedom as well. 40 pp. $15.95 from Random House. To order, go to www.randomhouse.com/kids or call 800-733-3000.

A SMILE AS BIG AS THE MOON

Author Mike Kersjes shares his amazing story as a small-town special education teacher who leads his learning disabled and emotionally impaired students to NASA's "Space Camp" for astronaut training. With his faith and persistence, Kersjes in *A Smile as Big as the Moon* turned his obstacle of getting

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[1]Home equity financing provided by Wells Fargo Banks. Members FDIC. ©2004 Wells Fargo Banks. All Rights Reserved. **Home equity lines of credit secured by homestead properties are not available in Texas.** [2]**Transportation not included with the getaway.** Offer valid for new purchase or refinance mortgage loan applications taken and closed through June 30, 2004 through this program. This offer is available for first mortgages through Wells Fargo Home Mortgage and not available on home equity loans and lines of credit and cannot be combined with any other program or offer. Contact your mortgage consultant for additional details, terms and conditions. The offer is administered by BI, which is not affiliated with Wells Fargo Home Mortgage and is subject to change without notice. The benefits of the **NEA Home Financing Program®** cannot be combined with any other offer. NEA Home Financing Program is a registered mark and NEA, Getaway is a service mark of NEA's Member Benefits Corp. Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, Inc. originates mortgage loans in New Hampshire under License No. 5757 MB for first mortgages and License No. 5768 MHL for second mortgages and is a New Jersey Department of Banking Licensed Mortgage Banker. ©2004 Wells Fargo Home Mortgage, Inc. All Rights Reserved. Information is accurate as of date of printing and is subject to change without notice. Credit subject to approval. 2/04 **Branches DM# DMCNEAHOTEL** HFNT0204

support from administrators to getting his kids to camp, where they exemplified a triumph of the human spirit. 274 pp. $13.95 from St. Martin's Griffin. To order, visit www.stmartins.com.

THE WRITE STUFF

The written word has been around for a long time, having evolved from pictures scrawled on a cave. In *Write Around the World: The Story of How and Why We Learned to Write*, authors Vivian French and Ross Collins enlist the help of six goofy birds to tour the world and show readers the evolution of writing from its earliest stages, to art, slang, and even secret codes. 32 pp. $16.95 from Oxford University Press. To order, go to www.oup.com or call, 800-451-7556.

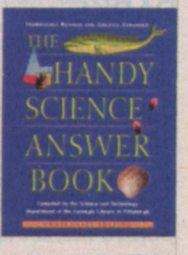
GIVE THEM POETRY!

Teachers can bring poetry into the classroom with Glenna Sloan's *Give Them Poetry: A Guide for Sharing Poetry with Children K–8*. Sloan, a poetry-passionate professor, features rich examples of classroom poetry and basis poetry and verse as a promoter of literacy. The book also has successful strategies for encouraging teachers to use poetry study with students. 91 pp. $17.95 from Teachers College Press. To order visit, www.teacherscollegepress.com.

A LETTER TO MY TEACHER

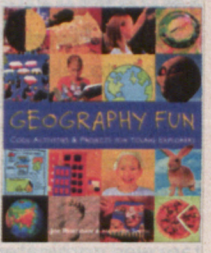
What do students wish teachers knew about them and about how they best learn? In *Fires in the Bathroom* by Kathleen Cushman, 40 high school students from urban areas advise teachers on how to better engage, motivate, and challenge; the crucial bargain students make with their most successful teachers; and how to improve student-teacher relationships. 190 pp. $24.95 from The New Press. To order, visit www.thenewpress.com.

THE HANDY SCIENCE BOOK



Why do golf balls have dimples? Why do leaves turn colors? *The Handy Science Answer Book* includes 1,700 of the most interesting, unusual, and frequently asked questions in this expanded centennial edition compiled by the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. 660 pp. $21.95 from Visible Ink Press. To order, call 734-667-3211 or visit www.visibleinkpress.com.

GEOGRAPHY FUN FOR YOUNG EXPLORERS



"What does geography have to do with me?" A lot. Find out the differences and similarities that we have with other people around the world. Make Thailand's watermelon slush or predict the weather with your own weather station. *Geography Fun: Cool Activities for Young Explorers* offers fun ideas for discovering your world. 144 pp. $14.95 from Sterling Publishing. To order, visit www.sterlingpub.com or call 800-805-5489.

THE BANGLES BUSINESS

Learn how five young women with very little money from Bangladesh, Pakistan, begin their different businesses in Ginger Howard's *A Basket of Bangles*, for grades K–3. Sufiya's dream of owning a business turns into a reality. However, the women must learn to read and write and understand banking principles before they successfully operate businesses, selling items such as bangles. 25 pp. $21.90 from Millbrook Press. To order, go to www.millbrookpress.com.

DIVERSITY CALENDAR

FEBRUARY

FEBRUARY 1–29—BLACK HISTORY MONTH

Started by Carter G. Woodson in the 1920s as Negro History Week, the commemoration was expanded to a month to reflect on the culture and accomplishments of Blacks in America. For more, go to http://search.eb.com/blackhistory/.

FEBRUARY 1—NATIONAL FREEDOM DAY

Presidential proclamation established this date in 1949 to commemorate the signing of the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery in 1865. For more, go to www.americaslibrary.gov/cgi-bin/page.cgi/es/pa/free_1.

FEBRUARY 24—MARDI GRAS

This day is also called Shrove Tuesday and is celebrated in Brazil, Germany, and especially in New Orleans and the southern United States. This is the last feast before Lent.

MARCH

MARCH 1–31—IRISH AMERICAN HERITAGE MONTH

This period was set aside by a presidential declaration to celebrate Irish history and its influence on American culture.

MARCH 1–31—NATIONAL MENTAL RETARDATION MONTH

A month set aside to increase and promote educational awareness of the 7.2 million Americans living with disabilities. For more on groups who promote awareness in this field visit www.thearc.org.

MARCH 4—FIRST WOMAN TO SERVE IN CONGRESS

Jeannette Rankin was the first woman member of Congress—elected four years before the 19th Amendment guaranteed women the right to vote. She started her term as a congresswoman from Montana on this day in 1917. Go to http://womenshistory.about.com/library/bio/blbio_jeannette_rankin.htm.

On TV

MIGHTY TIMES: THE LEGACY OF ROSA PARKS

HBO Family, February 8, 7 p.m., ET/PT.

You might think you know her story, but this documentary peels away one more layer. "Mighty Times" shows us Rosa Parks as part of a strong community that instantly supported her on that day in December 1955 when she refused to give up her bus seat to a white man. After Rosa was released from jail, fliers were published overnight: "Do Not Ride the Bus." A popular DJ makes announcements over the radio about meetings, bicycles are brought in, and churches buy station wagons to take workers to their jobs. The boycott also launched the career of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who at 26 was chosen over other pastors to lead the community's response. The bus boycott lasted 381 days, which was the length of time it took for her case to make its way to the Supreme Court. From Tell the Truth Pictures, this documentary was nominated for an Oscar. KIDSNET has produced a study guide on Rosa Parks, which can be downloaded for free at www.kidsnet.org/pdf/rosaparksguide.

NAT TURNER: A TROUBLESOME PROPERTY

PBS, February 10, 10 p.m., ET, check local listings.

Nat Turner's slave rebellion is a watershed event in America's long and troubled history of slavery and racial conflict. A groundbreaking exploration of race, violence, and memory in American life, this film tells the story of that violent confrontation and the ways the story has been continuously re-told since 1831. Nat Turner was a "troublesome property" for his master and he has remained a "troublesome property" for the historians, novelists, dramatists, artists, and many others who have struggled to understand him.

INNOVATION

PBS, February 10, 17, 24, and March 2, 9 p.m., ET, check local listings.

This series examines technology and science from a first person perspective. One narrative follows two retired CIA officers who now train FBI agents in anti-terror surveillance, adapting techniques they developed in the Cold War.

Another segment is about a blind woman who undergoes risky brain implant surgery to see again. Beyond the first person focus, viewers will appreciate the jargon-free, easily accessible presentation of science in this series. A companion site with materials is available from the series producer, Channel Thirteen in New York (www.thirteen.org).

Why Give...Why Not?
The NEA Foundation's planned giving program offers new options to help you leave a legacy. Your contribution can improve public education and benefit your heirs for years to come. Find out how you can make a BIG difference. Visit www.nfie.org/giving.htm or call 1.866.301.1737.
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THE NEA FOUNDATION

ILLUSTRATION: EMILY THOMPSON

Other outreach activities will occur at science centers and museums across the country, and a special *Sparks of INNOVATION* magazine is available by request at guiderequest@thirteen.org.

JAZZ HEROES

Ovation, February 10, 1:30 p.m., ET, check local listings.
Part of a series examining the world of jazz from 1946 to 1966, this episode, "Ella Fitzgerald: The Singer Not the Song," explores the overall impact of the legendary vocalist's life and career. The 30-minute show can be taped and used in the classroom for one year. Teaching materials are available at www.ovationtv.com/artszone.

FORCED TO FLEE: FAMINE AND PLAGUE

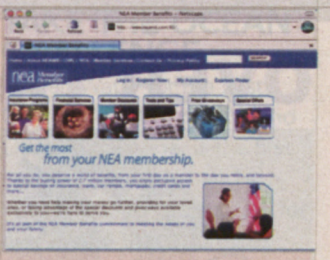
Discovery Channel, February 16, 9 a.m., ET.
This documentary explores how Ireland's potato famine drove Irish immigrants to America and how the bubonic plague helped end feudalism in medieval Europe. Can be taped and used in the classroom for one year. Teaching materials will be available at www.discoveryschool.com.

JFK: A PRESIDENCY REVEALED

History Channel, February 16 (part 1), February 17 (part 2), and February 18 (part 3), 6 a.m., ET.
This three-part profile of our 35th president includes White House audiotapes and Soviet footage from Kennedy's superpower summit. Can be taped and used in the classroom for two years. Teaching materials are available at www.historychannel.com/classroom.

On TV listings are provided by KIDSNET, a national resource for children's media in Washington, D.C., www.kidsnet.org and by Cable in the Classroom's Access Learning *magazine at www.ciconline.org.*

Heads Up From NEA Member Benefits



More than 77,000 NEA members visit www.neamb.com each month to get the latest offers and apply for products online.

OUR NEW SITE?—"OUTTA SIGHT"

is what people are saying about the revamped NEA Member Benefits Web Site. Introduced in December, the Site sports a sleek, new design that makes products and services easy to locate, eliminates multiple layers, and reduces the number of clicks needed to get where you want to go. If you haven't visited recently, sign on to www.neamb.com and peruse the Site's many great features including monthly giveaways and special offers, life cycle consumer guides, financial awareness bulletins, and home buying and retirement planning information with associated financial calculators.

You can also obtain quotes on various products and check your existing account information online. It's all there for you at www.neamb.com.

LOOKING FOR A WAY TO MAKE DEBT* DISAPPEAR?

The **NEA Personal Loan®** may be your solution. You could consolidate your high-interest debt and save with low rates available exclusively for NEA members. This plan includes affordable monthly payments to fit your budget and terms ranging from 24 to 84 months. No collateral is necessary and it costs nothing to apply. For more information or to apply, call 1-800-545-4094 and mention priority code IRZ7 for a decision in as little as 10 minutes! Or, visit www.neamb.com/pl to apply online. TDD users, call 1-800-833-6262. This account is administered by MBNA America Bank, N.A. *MBNA may prohibit use of an NEA Personal Loan to pay on another MBNA account.

OWL.ORG

COOKING UP READING RESOURCES AT OWL.ORG

This year's Read Across America (RAA) on March 2 will be the biggest and best celebration yet—and OWL.org is helping to make it happen! Members looking for ways to participate in RAA activities can log on to OWL.org and find fun-filled activities and resources available nowhere else. Browse through the "Book Buffet" to find a "Bread and Jam"-themed booklist perfect for the peanut butter and jelly set, or try "Eating and Reading Your Way Through History." Whatever your tastes, OWL has yummy book lists for all ages.

OWL.ORG
OUR WEB LOCATION FOR EDUCATION
A service of the National Education Association and its State and Local Affiliates

If you're looking for an alternative to green eggs and ham, this year's RAA menu includes special book "diets" of reading activities that teachers, education support professionals, and retired and higher ed members can use.

And if you can't resist Read Across merchandise, check out the cat-a-log for members-only items, including sweatshirts, neckties, and commemorative certificates. OWL has all this and more!

And don't forget to shop at your favorite online retailers through OWLShopper—you'll support both RAA literacy activities and OWL.org.

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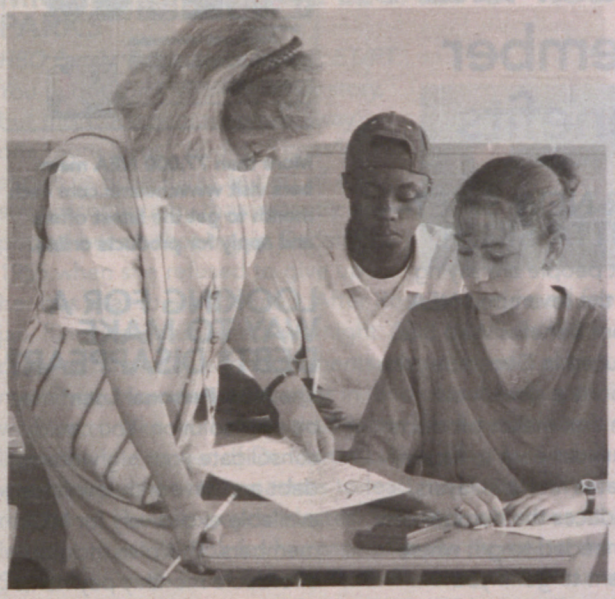
Good Teachers Develop Their Skills

OVER TIME...



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On the Web

BLACK HISTORY BIOGRAPHIES

Brush up on your African-American history on this Biography.com site that includes biographies ranging from George Washington Carver to Tiger Woods. Many of the life stories also come with video clips, as well as related links to the person being highlighted. Go to www.biography.com/blackhistory/.

A JOURNEY THROUGH SLAVERY

America's journey through slavery is presented in four parts in this site designed by PBS. For each era, you'll find a historical narrative, a resource bank of images, documents, stories, commentaries, and a Teacher's Guide for using the site's content in U.S. history courses. Go to www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html.

HISTORY SCAVENGER HUNT

Send students on a Black history scavenger hunt at www.educationworld.com/a_lesson/lesson052.shtml. Students can learn about famous Black Americans while polishing their Internet surfing skills. For students of all ages, the site organizes the scavenger hunts in fill-in-the-blank format with a list of Web sites where the information can be found.

TAKE THE OCEAN CHALLENGE

"Clean Water for the 21st Century," part of the Wyland Ocean Challenge, is the first interdisciplinary art and science educational program for grades K–6 that addresses these issues. Developed by the Scripps Institution of Oceanography (UCSD) and marine life artist Wyland, the site features free downloadable teacher's guides to enhance student's learning of adaptation, water cycles, envi-

On the Web *continues on next page*

BOOKS BY NEA MEMBERS

MEETING THE MATH STANDARDS WITH FAVORITE PICTURE BOOKS: LESSONS, ACTIVITIES, AND HANDS-ON REPRODUCIBLES THAT HELP YOU TEACH ESSENTIAL MATH SKILLS AND CONCEPTS

By Bob Krech

This book tells how to teach math through good literature—books and stories that inspire, amuse, and provoke kids into making connections and building skills. The collection includes math activities connected to 25 favorite children's books. Krech, an elementary math specialist, writes for learning standards-based math. Each featured title includes a plot summary and a list of primary content standards. (Grades 2–4) 80 pp. $12.95 from Scholastic, Inc. To order, go to www.scholastic.com.

FREE GONDOLA RIDE: A SUMMER WITH THE MEN BEHIND THE MYSTERY

By Kathleen Ann González

Learn about the history of the gondola and at the same time, take a "free ride" with the author, a high school English teacher, as she uncovers the true lifestyles of Venice's gondoliers. Originally intending to interview these boatmen as a proper journalist, González becomes fascinated with their unique occupation and finds herself drawn into their personal lives—getting to know their families, learning their language, and living an unexpected adventure. Thirty photos are interspersed within the text. 235 pp. $18. To order, go to www.freegondolaride.com.

TUNDRA TEACHER: A MEMOIR

By John Foley

Becoming a schoolteacher in a remote Eskimo village on St. Lawrence Island in the Bering Sea is not what John Foley imagined. He finds out what it's like to be in the racial minority. His wife feels isolated, lost, and unhappy; eventually they divorce. Thus, Foley tells his story. He speaks candidly about relationships, students, teachers, and village life. Using humor and insight in his difficult teaching situations, he writes about what many teachers face: a lack of self-confidence, frustration, and heart-breaking reality. 160 pp. $14.95 plus s&h from Epicenter Press. To order, go to www.epicenterpress.com or call 800-950-6663.

INQUIRY & THE LITERARY TEXT: CONSTRUCTING DISCUSSIONS IN THE ENGLISH CLASSROOM

By James Holden and John S. Schmit

Secondary and college practitioners Holden and Schmit offer theory-grounded, classroom-tested approaches for literature study in this book, which includes a primer on discussion-based classes and inquiry-focused instruction. The primer is followed by sections on 1) "how-to-do-it-tomorrow" approaches for enabling active learning and discussion; 2) diverse ways to (re)structure a course around inquiry; and 3) assessment strategies. (Grades 7–16). 189 pp. $31.95 from the National Council of Teachers of English. To order, go to www.ncte.org/store/books.

ILLUSTRATION: CREATAS

On the Web *continued*

ronmental stewardship, and conservation. Go to www.wylandoceanchallenge.com.

FOR CUSTODIANS

CMM Online, provided by *Cleaning and Maintenance Management* magazine, contains news and feature articles on carpet and floor cleaning, environmental issues, industry trends, and legal and government compliance issues. The site also offers "how to" tips on floor and restroom care and mold remediation. Visitors can access an online bulletin board and e-mail forum. Go to http://cmmonline.com.

What's Up at HIN

NEA HIN

RESILIENCY FOR GRADES 6–12: NEW ANIME POSTERS

Want a creative, educational way to help students cope with adversity? The NEA Health Information Network introduces a new resiliency poster series for grades 6–12. Each colorful, anime-style poster conveys one of five strategies to help students who are confronting trauma or loss stay resilient. To view or download this popular five-poster series, visit www.neahin.org/programs/mentalhealth/index.htm.

NEA HIN RYAN WHITE HIV PREVENTION AWARD

Each year NEA HIN presents the Ryan White HIV Prevention Award to an NEA member or affiliate who has shown a commitment to implementing or supporting innovative HIV prevention education. The award will be presented during the 2004 NEA Representative Assembly in Washington, D.C. To nominate an individual or affiliate contact NEA HIN for a nomination form at 202-822-7787 or e-mail psathrum@nea.org. The deadline for nomination applications is May 1.

CUSTODIAN GUIDE ON INDOOR AIR QUALITY

NEA HIN, NEA ESP Quality, and the Carpet and Rug Institute have developed a guide for custodians on indoor air quality and how it relates to their work on a daily basis. The guide provides tools, tips, and resources on how custodial staff can help maintain a healthy indoor environment. It also contains simple strategies for developing a local Association indoor air quality action plan. To learn how to obtain a copy, call 202-822-7570 or visit www.neahin.org/programs/environmental/iaq.htm.

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Are Your Reading Hats Ready?

March 2nd is almost here—are you ready to celebrate NEA's Read Across America and the joy of reading? In Florida, NEA student members are preparing a Seuss-apalooza, acting out Seussian style in honor of Dr. Seuss's 100th birthday. In Kansas, high school rodeo champions are rounding up good books to read in their reading rodeo. Looking for more ideas? Go to the Read Across America Web site at www.nea.org/readacross. You'll find new booklists, recipes for reading, ideas for celebrating reading, and so much more. And let us know what you're doing to spread the joy of reading on or around March 2nd by filling out our pledge forms.

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CERTIFICATION

Members who are seeking **National Board Certification** can apply for a low-cost loan designed to help cover the $2,300 assessment fee. The NEA National Board Certification Loan® is a special line of credit that has no application fee, no annual fee, no prepayment penalty, and no collateral is required. Call 1-800-603-3953 for more information or to apply.

EDUCATIONAL TOOLS

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For the Love of Kids

BY ARNOLD GUNDERSEN

Gundersen and a student work on a remote-control airplane.

TEACHING IS MY SECOND CAREER. I am a corporate retread. I spent 20 years in industry after graduating from college with a master's degree in nuclear engineering, progressing from an entry-level engineer to senior vice president.

I must confess that I didn't suddenly see the superiority of teaching and jump. No, I was pushed. Shoved. In fact, jettisoned. One day I noticed a serious safety violation in our nuclear facility, reported it to management, and was promptly fired. So I blew the whistle, got sued by my former company, lost my house, and was finally exonerated in Congressional hearings—and that's when I landed in teaching. I took a job at a boarding school where I could get both a salary and a roof overhead for me and my wife and family.

Now I'm a public school teacher and loving it. And I've learned some things that very few people in the higher echelons of the business world ever find out.

Eight years of teaching have taught me that teachers face significantly more challenges, play many more roles, and are paid considerably less than their corporate counterparts.

Were you brainwashed into believing teaching salaries are lower because corporate employees have more demanding jobs? Don't believe it! I have never worked harder in my life. People think that when the kids leave school, we kick back and unwind. Only our families see us grading papers on Sunday, planning lessons at 10 p.m., setting up labs at 7 a.m., or using our weekends and "long" summers to take recertification courses or pursue advanced degrees. Studies prove teachers work a minimum of 50-hours each week.

As teachers, we face not just long hours but also incomparable responsibility. Why is teaching so difficult? The velocity of our decision making is one reason. Teachers must make a critical decision every 20 seconds. What direction to take a lesson when the kids don't get it? How to discipline the student in the third row without disrupting the whole class? How to recover momentum after a public address announcement? Rarely is anyone in business under that type of minute-by-minute pressure. Corporate employees have time to mull things over, to reconvene a meeting in an attempt once again to reach a resolution, or even to sleep on an idea and finalize it the next day. Educators make more decisions in one class block than most business employees do in an entire day!

Why is teaching so difficult? The velocity of our decision making is one reason.

And they just keep coming. In business, if I had just dealt with a customer's issue, I could break for coffee or talk to a co-worker to clear my brain. In teaching, after I deal with a challenging student, I look up and see 23 other faces requiring my immediate attention.

Business results are tangible. Did the division or the product make money or lose money? It is usually easy to see a cause and effect relation to one's performance.

Contrast that with the intangible results of teaching. We often leave school wondering if we made any headway that day and questioning if a different approach might have made the message clearer. If we had "Eureka!" moments in every class, we might achieve the same instant gratification that much of the private sector has. But, we don't. Maybe several years, or even a decade later a student contacts us to say that we made a difference. Teaching is like planting an apple orchard; you must wait 25 years for the trees to finally mature and bear fruit. Psychologists claim that the longer the delay between action and results, the more challenging the task. By this standard, teaching certainly is the most demanding of jobs.

Additionally, each teacher must perform many different roles each day. In the corporate world, my role was clearly defined for me. The organization chart had a box with my name on it. I had a company car, a private parking space, and a paneled office to let other employees know their place in relation to mine. There is no organization chart to describe a classroom. Sometimes we are authority figures, but at other times we must take on the role of nurse, coach, custodian, lunchroom monitor, or mentor. We often must perform dissimilar roles to different students at the same time. Each role is critical, for it may be the one key that enables a student to achieve academic success or social integration.

Clearly in our profession, what we say and do makes an incredible impact on a young person's self image. In business, one may fire an employee who isn't performing, but we cannot fire a student who is not working or is not motivated to succeed. If we are at our best, we may be able to encourage, inspire, and lead. So, all of us must be at our very best every minute of each long and challenging day.

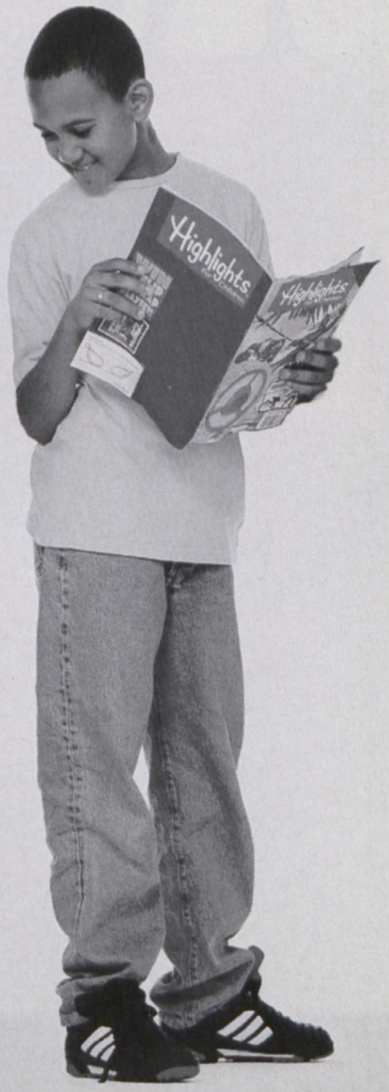
But those intangible rewards outweigh the hassles. I am proud to be a teacher. And, about that career as a senior VP, I look back and marvel at how easy it was. nea

Arnold Gundersen teaches mathematics at Burlington High School, Burlington, Vermont.

PHOTO: ALDEN PELLETT

One size does not fit all.

Every child can learn, but parents and teachers know that children need individual attention based on their individual needs.



The so-called "No Child Left Behind Law" imposes a one-size-fits-all approach and demands that all children meet the same level of achievement in the same amount of time, regardless of individual differences.

Despite political rhetoric about adequate funding, new federal mandates waste scarce resources on things children need **least**: more paperwork, more bureaucracy, and more standardized tests.

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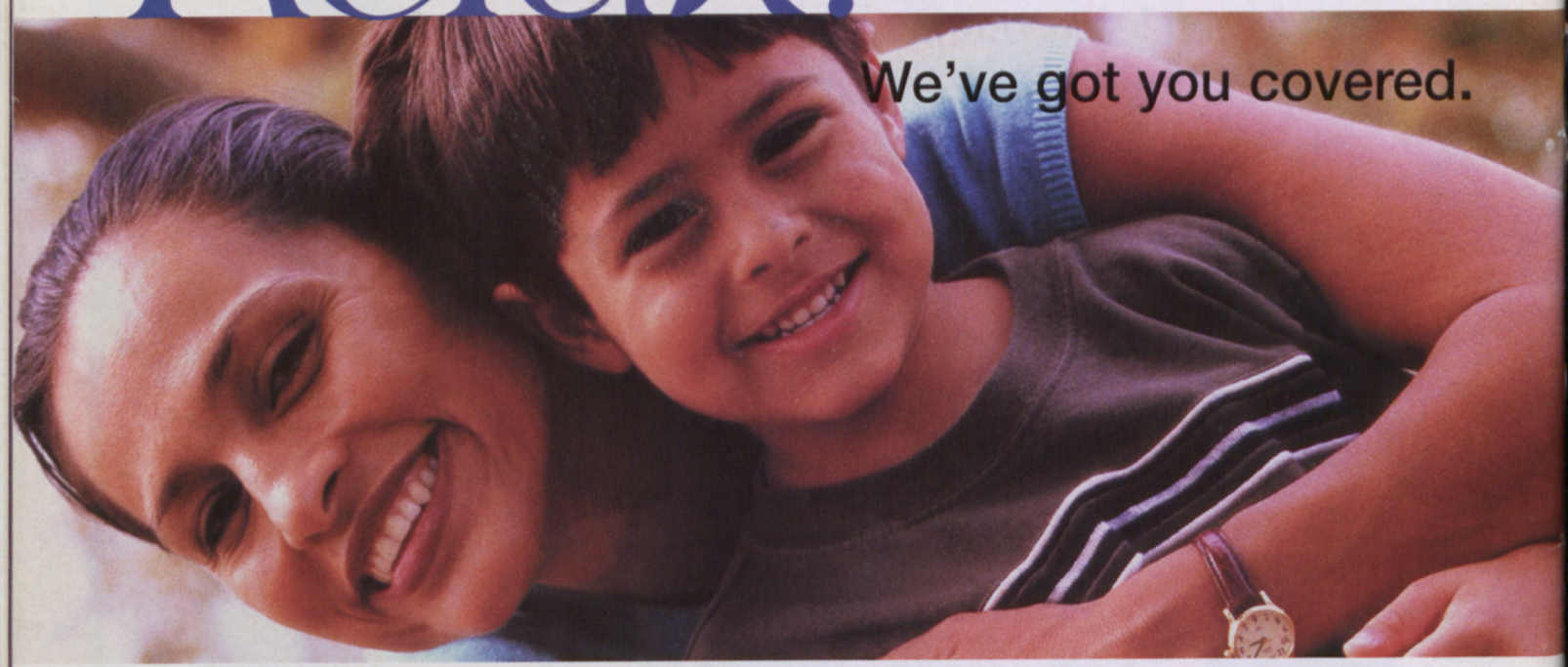

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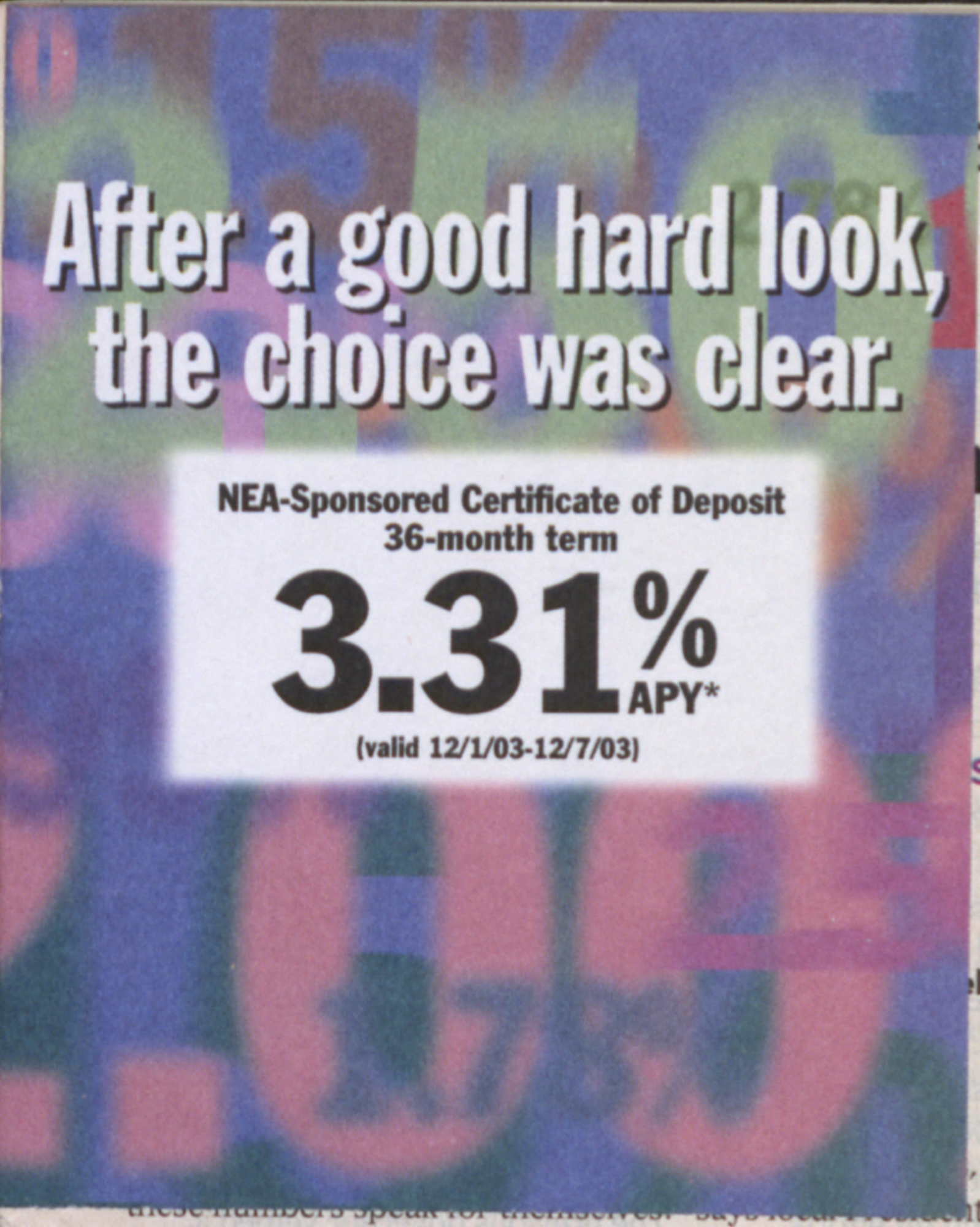
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24 Months	2.75 % APY*	1.65 % APY**	1.80 % APY**	1.75 % APY**
36 Months	3.31 % APY*	2.15 % APY**	2.40 % APY**	2.00 % APY**
48 Months	3.71 % APY*	2.65 % APY**	2.85 % APY**	2.75 % APY**
60 Months	4.26 % APY*	3.05 % APY**	3.30 % APY**	2.99 % APY**

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**All other bank APYs shown in the comparison chart are valid as of 11/25/03, based on balances of $1,000 and monthly terms shown. Source - *Market Rates Insight*, 11/25/03.

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